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Muhammad Suheyl Umar

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DIVERSITY OF REVELATION

Frithjof Schuon

Seeing that there is but one Truth, must we not conclude that there is but one Revelation, one sole Tradition possible? To this our answer is, first of all, that Truth and Revelation are not absolutely equivalent terms, since Truth is situated beyond forms, whereas Revelation, or the Tradition which derives from it, belongs to the formal order, and that indeed by definition; but to speak of form is to speak of diversity, and so of plurality; the grounds for the existence and nature of form are: expression, limitation, differentiation. What enters into form, thereby enters also into number, hence into repetition and diversity; the formal principle— inspired by the infinity of the divine Possibility— confers diversity on this repetition. One could conceive, it is true, that there might be only one Revelation or Tradition for this our human world and that diversity should be realised through other worlds, unknown by man or even unknowable by him; but that would imply a failure to understand that what determines the difference among forms of Truth is the difference among human receptacles. For thousands of years already, humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches, which constitute so many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands differentiated refractions of the one Truth. Let us note that this is not always a question of race, but more often of human groups, very diverse perhaps, but none the less subject to mental conditions which, taken as a whole, make of them sufficiently homogeneous spiritual recipients; though this fact does not prevent some individuals from being able to leave their framework, for the human collectivity never has anything absolute about it. This being so, it can be said that the diverse Revelations do not really contradict one another, since they do not apply to the same receptacle, and since God never addresses the same message to two or more receptacles of divergent character, corresponding analogically, that is, to dimensions which are formally incompatible; contradictions arise only on one and the same level.

The apparent antinomies between Traditions are like differences of language or of symbol; contradictions are in human receptacles, not in God; the diversity in the world is a function of its remoteness from the divine Principle, which amounts to saying that the Creator cannot will both that the world should be, and that it should not be the world.

If Revelations more or less exclude one another, this is so of necessity because God, when He speaks, expresses Himself in absolute mode; but this absoluteness relates to the universal content rather than to the form; it applies to the latter only in a relative and symbolical sense, because the form is a symbol of the content and so too of humanity as a whole, to which this content is, precisely, addressed. It cannot be that God should compare the diverse Revelations from outside as might a scholar; He keeps Himself so to speak at the centre of each Revelation, as if it were the only one. Revelation speaks an absolute language, because God is absolute, not because the form is; in other words, the absoluteness of the Revelation is absolute in itself, but relative *qua* form.

The language of the sacred Scriptures is divine, but at the same time it is necessarily the language of men; it is made for men and could be divine only in an indirect manner. This incommensurability between God and our means of expression is clear in the Scriptures, where neither our words, nor our logic are adequate to the celestial intention; the language of mortals does not *a priori* envisage things *sub specie aeternitatis*. The uncreated Word shatters created speech while directing it towards the Truth; it manifests thus its transcendence in relation to the limitations of human powers of logic; man must be able to overstep these limits if he wishes to attain the divine meaning of the words, and he oversteps them in metaphysical knowledge, the fruit of pure intellection, and in a certain fashion also in love, when he touches the essences. To wish to reduce divine Truth to the conditionings of earthly truth is to forget that there is no common measure between the finite and the Infinite.

The absoluteness of a Revelation demands its unicity; but on the level of facts such unicity cannot occur to the extent of a fact being produced that is unique of its kind, that is to say constituting on its own what amounts to a whole genus. Reality alone is unique, on whatever level it is envisaged: God,

universal Substance, divine Spirit immanent in this Substance; however, there are 'relatively unique' facts, Revelation for example, for since all is relative and since even principles must suffer impairment, at any rate in appearance, and in so far as they enter into contingencies, uniqueness must be able to occur on the plane of facts; if unique facts did not exist in any fashion, diversity would be absolute, which is contradiction pure and simple. The two must both be capable of manifesting themselves, unicity as well as diversity; but the two manifestations are of necessity relative, the one must limit the other. It results from this, on the one hand that diversity could not abolish the unity which is its substance, and on the other that unity or unicity must be contradicted by diversity on its own plane of existence; in other words, in every manifestation of unicity, compensatory diversity must be maintained, and indeed a unique fact occurs only in a part and not in the whole of a cosmos. It could be said that such and such a fact is unique in so far as it represents God for such and such an environment, but not in so far as it exists; this existing however does not abolish the symbolism of the fact, it repeats it outside the framework, within which the unique fact occurred, but on the same plane. Existence, which conveys the divine Word, does not abolish the unicity of such and such a Revelation in its providentially appointed field, but it repeats the manifestation of the Word outside this field; it is thus that diversity, without abolishing the metaphysically necessary manifestation of unicity, none the less contradicts it outside a particular framework, but on the same level, in order thus to show that the uncreated and non-manifested Word alone possesses absolute unicity.

If the objection is raised that at the moment when a Revelation occurs, it is none the less unique for the world, and not for a part of the world only, the answer is that diversity does not necessarily occur in simultaneity, it extends also to the temporal succession, and this is clearly the case when it is a question of Revelations. Moreover, a uniqueness of fact must not be confused with a uniqueness of principle; we do not deny the possibility of a fact unique to the world in a certain period, but that of a fact unique in an absolute sense. A fact which appears unique in space, is not so in time, and inversely; but even within each of these conditions of existence, it could never be affirmed that a fact is unique of its kind— for it is the genus or the quality, not the particularity, which is in question— because we can

measure neither time nor space, and still less other modes which elude us.

This whole doctrine is clearly illustrated by the following example: the sun is unique in our solar system, but it is not so in space; we can see other suns, since they are situated in space like ours, but we do not see them as suns. The uniqueness of our sun is belied by the multiplicity of the fixed stars, without thereby ceasing to be valid within the system which is ours under Providence; the unicity is then manifested in the part, not in the totality, although this part is an image of the totality and represents it for us; it then 'is', by the divine Will, the totality, but only for us, and only in so far as our mind, whose scope is likewise willed by God, does not go beyond forms; but even in this case, the part 'is' totality so far as its spiritual efficacy is concerned.

We observe the existence, on earth, of diverse races, whose differences are 'valid' since there are no 'false' as opposed to 'true' races; we observe also the existence of multiple languages, and no one thinks of contesting their legitimacy; the same holds good for the sciences and the arts. Now it would be astonishing if this diversity did not occur also on the religious plane, that is to say if the diversity of human receptacles did not involve diversity of the divine contents, from the point of view of form, not of essence. But just as man appears, in the framework of each race, simply as 'man' and not as a 'White' or a 'Yellow', and as each language appears in its own sphere as 'language' and not as such and such a language among others, so each religion is of necessity on its own plane 'religion', without any comparison or relative connotation which, in view of the end to be attained, would be meaningless; to say 'religion' is to say 'unique religion'; explicitly to practise one religion, is implicitly to practise them all.

An idea or an enterprise which comes up against insurmountable obstacles is contrary to the nature of things; the ethnic diversity of humanity and the geographical extent of the earth suffice to make highly unlikely the axiom of one unique religion for all men, and on the contrary highly likely— to say the least— the need for a plurality of religions; in other words, the idea of a single religion does not escape

contradiction if one takes account of its claims to absoluteness and universality on the one hand, and the psychological and physical impossibility of their realisation on the other, not to mention the antinomy between such claims and the necessarily relative character of all religious mythology; only pure metaphysic and pure prayer are absolute and therefore universal. As for 'mythology', it is— apart from its intrinsic content of truth and efficacy— indispensable for enabling metaphysical and essential truth to 'gain a footing' in such and such a human collectivity.

Religion is a 'supernaturally natural' fact which proves its truth— from the point of view of extrinsic proofs— by its human universality, so that the plurality and ubiquity of the religious phenomenon constitutes a powerful argument in favour of religion as such. Just as a plant makes no mistake in turning towards the light, so man makes no mistake in following Revelation and, in consequence, in following tradition. There is something infallible in the natural instinct of animals, and also in the 'supernatural instinct' of men; but man is the only 'animal' capable of going against nature as such, either wrongly by violating it, or else by transcending it.

‘WITH ALL THY MIND’

Martin Lings

(Shaykh Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din)

It could be said that one of the criteria of orthodoxy in a religion is that it should provide adequate means for the fulfilment of the following commandment in all its aspects: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind, and with all thy strength.[1]

The most essential part of the commandment is clearly its opening. The heart is the organ of faith, whose higher possibilities are certainty, intellection, gnosis. It is called ‘heart’ because it is as central and vital to the soul as the physical heart is to the body. The function of a centre is always that of attraction and radiation, on the one hand to draw towards it the outlying parts and to keep them knitted together as an integral whole, and on the other to transmit to them, according to the measure and the mode of their varying capacities, what it receives from worlds which lie above and beyond it. To ‘love with all thy heart’ means total love. Mind and soul, which depend ultimately on the heart for love of God, needed separate mention in the commandment only because their domination by the centre was reduced at the Fall to being no more than a virtuality, and because on the path of return to the primordial state of loving ‘with all thy heart’, mind-love and soul-love have a function of cause— or so it seems— in the process of re-awakening heart-love, though they could never be fully realized except as a result of that re-awakening. The give and the take in question correspond to the interaction of human initiative and Divine Grace. However much the manner of expression may vary, religions are in agreement that a minimum of effort from mind or soul in the direction of the heart, that is, the

[1] St. Mark, XII, 30. In Deuteronomy VI, 5, to which this is a reference, the element ‘mind’ is not mentioned, which makes no fundamental difference since the mind is strictly speaking a psychic faculty, and is therefore implicit in the word ‘soul’. In St. Matthew, XXII, 37, on the other hand, the element ‘strength’ is absent which again makes no difference inasmuch as physical energy and endurance are dominated by the will, which is also a psychic faculty.

Transcendent, is guaranteed to call down upon itself a vivifying and growth-promoting force out of all proportion to the gesture that released it. But that human gesture needs to be continually repeated.

Loss of direct contact with the heart meant loss of that inward attraction which alone could counterbalance the centrifugal tendencies of the other faculties. Left to their own resources, they were bound to move further and further from the centre and therefore from each other. This process of disintegration, although checked and even partially reversed for brief periods by repeated Divine interventions throughout the course of time, is inevitably now near to reaching its extremities, inasmuch as all traditions agree that we are approaching the end of this temporal cycle; and one of the most striking features of the general disintegration characteristic of modern man is an unparalleled mental independence by reason of which many minds are feverishly active and almost 'acrobatically' nimble. The same lack of anchorage makes also for an abnormally hurried superficiality of judgement and conclusion.

It is this mental independence which makes so timely and so necessary the chapter on 'Understanding and Believing' in Frithjof Schuon's *Logic and Transcendence*.[2] The author focuses our attention on the monstrous yet now not uncommon phenomenon of understanding metaphysical truths in the mind without any assent of belief from the soul, let alone the heart. The only remedy is re-integration, since only if the different faculties are knit closer together can the soul be brought within near enough reach of the mind to respond to the light of the doctrine, which is addressed to the mind directly. But mental understanding followed by re-integration are as a second and third stage in the path of return. In the present context we are concerned with the preliminary stage of removing obstacles which make it difficult or impossible for the mind to understand. Intelligence has its rights, and these have not always been upheld by the representatives of religion. The mental faculties need to be appeased and re-assured ; and to this end religion has no option but to sacrifice certain half-truths, not to speak of mere suppositions and conjectures, which in the past were considered as powerful motives for loving God 'with all thy soul and with all thy strength.'

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[2] Ch. XII (Harper and Row, 1975).

A religion's claim to unique efficacy must be allowed the status of half-truth because there is, in fact, in the vast majority of cases, no alternative choice.[3] In the past it would have been as pointless for a religion to dwell on the validity and efficacy of other religions as it would be for an announcement to be made from an all-capacious lifeboat to those struggling in the waters about it that five miles away there was an equally good lifeboat. The lack of any such acknowledgment did not cause minds to falter in their worship, because each traditional civilization lived for the most part in high-walled isolation from other sectors of humanity. Moreover, there is nothing questionable in the general notion that certain religions are defunct and have been superseded by Divine intervention. Nor can it be doubted that pseudo-religion is a possibility, since the scriptures themselves speak of false prophets. A mediaeval Christian, for example, was therefore not mentally compromised because he classed Judaism as a superseded religion or because he classed Islam as a pseudo-religion. Everyone has a right to be ignorant or mistaken about what takes place in worlds other than his own.

But in the present age the isolating walls have for the most part been broken down. Otherwise expressed, the lifeboats are mostly within reach of each other, and life lines even cross; and minds are inevitably troubled by thoughts which would never have assailed them in the past. In a word, it becomes difficult to dedicate the mind to the worship of God when religious authorities make claims which the intelligence sees to be in direct contradiction with what religion teaches about the nature of God.

It may be objected that if the present situation is new, globally speaking, it none the less existed in the past, if only for relatively small minorities who lived at the frontiers which separated one theocratic civilization from another. For the last thirteen hundred years and more, Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in the Near East, with ample opportunities

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[3] As Frithjof Schuon has remarked, for those who come face to face with the founder of a new religion, the lack of alternative choice becomes as it were absolute in virtue of the correspondingly absolute greatness of the Divine Messenger himself. It is moreover at its outset, that is, during its brief moment of 'absoluteness', that the claims of a religion are for the most part formulated. But with the passage of time there is inevitably a certain levelling out between the new and the less new, the more so in that the less new may have special claims on certain people

for seeing that 'the other religion' is, in fact, just as genuine as their own. But until recent times the vast majority, including intellectuals, were none the less able, in all peace of mind, to live out their lives in the conviction that their religion alone was truly valid. Why should not the same exclusivism still be compatible with mental serenity?

The answer is partly that the frontiers which separate one perspective from another are not merely geographical. In a theocratic civilization, men are perpetually surrounded by reminders of God and the Beyond; and this produces an 'inwardness' which is both individual and collective, and which is itself a kind of isolating wall.[4] The destruction of such walls is an evil; but the virtues they helped to maintain are indispensable and must be supported by other means. The following quotation, though it goes far beyond the context of what we are considering here, is none the less extremely relevant to the question of 'half-truths' as obstacles to mental co-operation in piety.[5]

> The usual religious arguments, through not probing sufficiently to the depth of things and moreover not having previously had any need to do so, are psychologically somewhat outworn and fail to satisfy certain requirements of causality. If human societies degenerate on the one hand with the passage of time, they accumulate on the other hand experiences in virtue of old age, however intermingled with errors these may be. This paradox is something that any pastoral teaching intended to be effective should take into account, not by drawing new directives from the general error, but on the contrary by using arguments of a higher order, intellectual rather than sentimental.

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[4] 'Aloof' and 'introspective' are the epithets applied by Kenneth Cragg to the Eastern Churches, whom he severely criticizes in *The Call of the Minaret* for having done practically nothing throughout the centuries to convert the Islamic East to Christianity. It does not seem to occur to him that the qualities in question, though inconvenient for missionaries, are nearer to virtue than to vice. Moreover, the 'aloofness' may well be in part a subconscious unwillingness to 'rush in where angels fear to tread'.

[5] Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy,* World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, London, 1976; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000, p. 53.

Mental dilemma is a more or less inevitable consequence of seeking to maintain, in the modern world, all the details of the average religious perspective which characterized one's pious ancestors. A striking example of this is to be seen in an article on Jesus which a Jewish Rabbi was recently invited to write in one of our leading newspapers, the purpose of the invitation being to have an opinion which was representative of orthodox Jewry as a whole. The Rabbi's exposition is based on the question: What prompted Jesus to claim that he was the Messiah? A Jew, he maintains, is well qualified to answer this question in virtue of his special knowledge of the history of his own people, from which he knows that expectations of the Messiah had never been so strong as they were at that particular time. There was a kind of collective wishful thinking in the air which made it almost inevitable that someone would persuade himself and others that he was, in fact, the Lord's Anointed. The Rabbi goes on to speak appreciatively of Jesus as a man, acknowledges his excellent human qualities, emphasizes his good intentions, and excuses him for his messianic claims.

As a purely psychological explanation of how the Christian religion came into existence, this article opens up the way for someone else to demolish Judaism by exactly the same type of argument. Another point to be noticed is that the author, so it seems, does not dare to think beyond early first century Palestine either in time or in space. He speaks almost as if the crucifixion had only just been perpetrated, closing forever, as it must then have seemed to not a few, one of many chapters in the chronicle of false messianic claims. But what of world history in the last two thousand years? What of the fact that this 'false messiah' has taken possession, spiritually speaking, of three continents and half possession of a fourth, while making considerable inroads into the fifth? And what of the God who has allowed this wide-spread, long-lasting, deep-rooted deception to take place?

In other words, a would-be demonstration of the falsity of another religion proves to be a boomerang which comes back to strike at the very heart of one's own religion. For God is the heart of every religion; and a god who would allow deception on such a colossal scale would not be worth worshipping, even by the 'chosen people whom he had protected against that deception.'

On such a basis, belief can only be kept up by not following certain trains of thought which demand to be followed, and by refusing to draw certain obvious conclusions— in fact by no longer being equipped 'with all thy mind', let alone loving God. Such belief is exceedingly precarious; and even if the believer in question can live out his own life in orthodoxy to the end, he has little means of fortifying others, and he is in perpetual danger of finding any day that his sons and his daughters have lapsed into agnosticism or atheism. The anti-spiritual pressures of the modem world being what they are— and this applies especially to modern education— the scales are heavily weighted against finding the only true solution, namely a more universal spiritual perspective, which means moving nearer to the Spirit and therefore 'upstream' and 'against the current'. On the other hand, the false solution of agnosticism is simply the next easy step down from misgivings about religion that are based on rationalism and pseudo-logic.

It seems to the Jew that to admit the Messianic claims of Jesus would amount to admitting that Judaism has been superseded— and Christians are waiting at the door to tell him that this is indeed the case. He wrongly imagines himself to be faced, practically speaking, with a choice between Judaism and Christianity. But it would be possible— and this is certainly a solution which some orthodox Jews have individually[6] found for themselves— at least to reserve judgement about Jesus, or even to accept in his first coming a foretaste of the final and all-fulfilling Messianic advent, while continuing to cling to the God-given certainties of the Pentateuch and the Psalms. For Jews who were not swept into Christianity on the crest of its initial wave, the fact that the Messianic mission has not yet been altogether fulfilled can be taken as a sign that Judaism has not yet been superseded and as a justification for remaining faithful to the religion of Moses.

It is relatively easy for the Jew to go half way towards the perspective of *religio perennis* simply by reserving judgement about other religions. Since Judaism is not a world religion he can, with a clear conscience, leave other sectors of humanity to Providence in the certainty that It will take care of them. The Christian on the other hand feels himself to be the chosen

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[6] For the ideal collective attitude of Judaism to Christianity, and for the reasons why it could never be realized, see Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, p. 58.

instrument of Providence in this respect, as indeed he is, but within limits. The Church's refusal to see these limits results in a perspective which, in the modem world, runs dangerously close to the precipice of disbelief.

It is now some years since the already mentioned book *The Call of the Minaret* was published, and there is reason to think that the views of its author have moved since that time in a more universal direction. It is none the less a faithful mirror of the dilemma which faces many Christians, in particular clergymen and more especially missionaries, who come into close contact with Islam, and who cannot help being deeply impressed by its strength and its fullness as a religion. It is impossible for them to persist in calling Muhammad a 'false prophet'. On the other hand they will not, or as the case may be, dare not, give up their claim that the Passion of Jesus is the sole means of man's redemption. The point of the book's title is that the muezzin's call should be for Christians as a summons to duty, 'the duty of restoring to Muslims the Christ that they have missed.' The author adds: 'The Christ Jesus of the historic faith is an unescapable figure. It is He we must present to the world of Islam ... yet how we are to do this remains a problem and a burden!' These last words are an understatement. It is almost impossible to make adult Muslims accept the Christian doctrine of redemption, for they already have a full doctrine of Divine Grace and Mercy in another form, and the historic Jesus plays no part in it, although he remains a most benevolent and glorious onlooker. The Qur'an calls him the Word of God and a Spirit from God; and Muhammad testified to his second coming. In the days of the Caliphate, one of the traditional ways of wishing long life to a Caliph was to say to him: May you live long enough to give your government into the hands of Jesus, the son of Mary— Peace be on them both! But it would be impossible to introduce Jesus into the inner structure of Islam, for the building is already complete and perfect. Providence has not been waiting nearly fourteen hundred years for some Christian missionary to lay the foundation stone.

The author in question seems to have certain suspicions along these lines, and sparks of exasperation— or something akin to that— fly out from time to time: 'Islam has proved in history the supreme displacer of the faith of Christ', and 'The rise of Islam will always be a painful puzzle to the Christian mind.' But although he speaks of 'transcending difficulties', there is nothing

really transcendent in the book from beginning to end, and that is its weakness. On such a basis, there can clearly be no question of 'loving with all thy mind'.

The same criticisms cannot be made of A *New Threshold*[7] by the Bishop of Guildford, because there is at least one remarkable outlet onto universality in a timely quotation from St. Justin Martyr's *Apology*, where the uniqueness of Christ as Redeemer is expounded at the level of the Logos and not allowed to trespass upon lower domains which are subject to multiplicity. From this point of view, the act of Redemption belongs to the Divine Nature of Jesus, not to his human nature, and since it thus transcends time and space, it cannot be limited to any historical event. 'We have been taught that Christ is the First begotten of God, and have testified that he is the Intellect (*logos*) of which every race of man partakes. Those who lived in accordance with intellect are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them . . . Those who lived by Intellect, and those who so live now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed'.[8]

In recalling St. Justin's standpoint as a legitimate one for Christians to take with regard to adherents of other religions, the Bishop of Guildford thereby implicitly assents to its unescapable corollary that the act of Redemption operates in other modes as well as in the specifically Christian mode of the Passion. The contrary claim, that in a world subject to multiplicity the Divine Mercy, by definition Infinite, should be limited to one single effective act is in principle something that a metaphysician cannot readily accept, quite apart from the overwhelming factual evidence against it. Admittedly the majority cannot be sacrificed to a minority; but certain claims which may have 'worked' in the past are of an increasingly dubious value for the majority while being lethal to the intellectual minority. There are Christians for whom the *Bhagavat Gita* comes next to the Gospels and the Psalms as their most reverend book; and this Hindu scripture bears a most eloquent and

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[7] This booklet, with the subtitle, 'Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim Communities' has recently been published to coincide with the World of Islam Festival.

[8] *First Apology*, Section 46. For the word 'Reason, as translation of *logos*, we have substituted 'Intellect'.

irrefutable witness to a redeeming Divine Incarnation other than Jesus in the person of Krishna and, by extension, of other Hindu Avataras, including the Buddha. As Frithjof Schuon remarks: [9]

> Every exoteric doctrine is in fact characterized by a disproportion between its dogmatic demands and its dialectical guarantees; for its demands are absolute as deriving from the Divine Will and therefore also from Divine Knowledge, whereas its guarantees are relative, because they are independent of this Will and based, not on Divine Knowledge, but on a human point of view, that of reason and sentiment. For instance, Brahmins are invited by Christian missionaries to abandon completely a religion that has lasted for several thousand of years, one that has provided the spiritual support of innumerable generations and has produced flowers of wisdom and holiness down to our times. The arguments that are produced to justify this extraordinary demand are in no wise logically conclusive, nor do they bear any proportion to the magnitude of the demand; the reasons that the Brahmins have for remaining faithful to their spiritual patrimony are therefore infinitely stronger than the reasons by which it is sought to persuade them to cease being what they are. The disproportion, from the Hindu point of view, between the immense reality of the Brahmanic tradition and the insufficiency of the religious counter arguments is such as to prove quite sufficiently that had God wished to submit the world to one religion only, the arguments put forward on behalf of this religion would not be so feeble, nor those of certain so-called 'infidels' so powerful; in other words,

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[9] *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Harper and Row, 1975), p. 14. The title 'With All Thy Mind' makes the many references to Frithjof Schuon inevitable because his writings lead the way in giving the mind its due in respect of religion. Not that they are limited to the mind, any more than the mind, in the context of 'with all thy mind', can be limited to itself, since to be fully operative its higher reaches depend directly on the heart. It is to the mind, to the intermediary intellective faculties, and to the heart that Frithjof Schuon's writings are above all addressed— a domain covered by the words *Logic and Transcendence* which might serve in a sense as a title for most of his books as they do in fact for one. To avoid giving a false impression, however, it must be added, as regards the soul, that while demolishing certain outworn human arguments which have in the past served the cause of 'with all thy soul', he puts other arguments of a higher order in their place. Few writers, if any, have so clearly demonstrated the importance of sacred art in this respect. And who in recent centuries has written so profoundly and unmoralistically about the necessity of virtue?

> if God were on the side of one religious form only, the arguments put forward on behalf of this religion would be such that no man of good faith would be able to resist it'.

To this passage, written for Christians in affirmation of the validity of Hinduism, let us add the following in affirmation of Islam:[10]

> .....that God could have allowed a religion that was merely the invention of a man to conquer a part of humanity and to maintain itself for more than a thousand years in a quarter of the inhabited world, thus betraying the love, faith, and hope of a multitude of sincere and fervent souls— this is contrary to the Laws of the Divine Mercy, or in other words, to those of Universal Possibility ....If Christ had been the only manifestation of the Word, supposing such a uniqueness of manifestation to be possible, the effect of His birth would have been the instantaneous reduction of the universe to ashes.

To consider now the limitations of Muslim exoterism, it must be remembered that from its stronghold of finality as the last religion of this cycle of time, Islam, unlike Judaism and Christianity, can afford to be generous to other religions. Moreover its position in the cycle confers on it something of the function of a summer-up, which obliges it to mention with justice what has preceded it, or at the least to leave an open door for what it does not specifically mention.

> *Verily We have sent messengers before thee*[11] *About some of them have We told thee, and about some have We not told thee.*[12]

We may quote also:

> *Verily the Faithfu1*[13] *and the Jews and the Sabians*[14] *and the Christians whoso believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth deeds of piety-no fear shall come upon them neither shall they grieve.*[15]

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[10] *ibid,* p. 20.
[11] Muhammad.
[12] Qur'an, XL, 78.

There is a place for both Judaism and Christianity with in the Islamic civilization, and Muslims are obliged to protect the synagogues and churches and other Jewish and Christian sanctuaries. It was a calamity for Spanish Jews when the Christians re conquered Spain.

It has to be admitted, however, that the authorities of Islam have been no less ready than their counterparts in other religions to risk 'with all thy mind' for the sake of 'With all thy soul and with all thy strength'. Muslims have been encouraged to believe, and the majority have been only too eager to believe, that Islam has superseded all other religions and that it is therefore the sole truly valid religion on earth. But however absolute the claims of Muslim theologians and jurisprudents may be, they are shown in fact to be relative by the tolerance which Islam makes obligatory towards Judaism and Christianity. Taken with that 'grain of salt'— though few are fully conscious of it— the claims in question are not necessarily unpalatable to the intelligence, and are not bound to prevent an intellectual from loving God with all his mind, provided he remain within the walls of the Islamic civilization, which stop him from seeing the full implications of this exclusivism.

But once outside these walls, the situation is different. The most that a sound intelligence can accept are the claims which naturally result from the fact that Islam represents the most recent Divine intervention upon earth. But these claims, though considerable, are relative, not absolute[16] and a Muslim intellectual in the modern world will not find peace of mind except by assenting to this. It should not however be difficult for him to do so, for a glance at those passages of the Qur'an on which the theologians' exclusivism is based shows that the verses in question call for a deeper and more universal interpretation than is generally given.

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[13] Muslims.

[14] There is no general consensus of opinion as to what religion is referred to, and certain Muslim rulers, in India and elsewhere, have made the name in question a loophole for tolerance towards their non-Muslim, non-Christian and non Jewish subjects.

[15] V, 69.

[16] An orthodox Jew, for example, deeply in love with the Hebrew Psalms, would be justified in hesitating to give up his religion for one that was based on a Revelation in a language he did not know; and he could use Quranic argument to justify himself.

One of these passages is the following:

He it is who hath sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of Truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion, though the idolaters be averse.[17]

This verse can be given a narrower or a wider interpretation. Its more immediate meaning is clearly the narrower one: the *messenger* is Muhammad, *the religion of Truth is* the Quranic message and the *idolaters* are the pagan Arabs, Persians, Berbers, and certain other pagans. But what of the words *that He may make it prevail over all religion?* It is here that the crux of the matter may be said to lie.

Whatever the disadvantages of modern education, it serves to implant a more global concept of world history and geography than is normally held by members of traditional civilisations which tend, as we have seen, to be 'aloof' and 'introspective'. The wider knowledge is a mixed blessing, but where it exists it must be taken into account. An intelligent Muslim, living in the modern world, is bound to realize sooner or later, suddenly or gradually, not only that the Quranic message has not been made to *prevail over all religion,* but also that Providence itself is directly responsible for the 'short-coming'. The shock of this realization may shatter his belief, unless he be enabled to understand that the verse in question has a wider significance. In the narrower sense, *all religion* can only be taken to mean 'all religion in your part of the world'. But if *all religion* be interpreted in an absolute sense, and if *idolaters* be made to include such people as the Germans and Celts, many of whom were still pagan at the outset of Islam, then *the religion of Truth* must also be given its widest application, and the words 'once again' must be understood. (i. e. He it is who hath sent once again His messenger . . .), for the Divinity has sent messengers before, and never with anything other than *the religion of Truth.* These last four words, like the term Islam itself, can be taken in a universal sense, to include all true religion. The Qur'an makes it clear that the religions of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus may be called 'Islam! in its literal meaning of 'submission to God'. In this sense Islam

[17] IX, 33.

may be said to have been made to *prevail over all religion*.[18] But in its narrower sense Islam has only been allowed to *prevail over all religion* in a limited part of the world. It is now fourteen hundred years since the revelation of the Qur'an and Providence has allowed non-Quranic modes of *the religion of Truth* to remain as barriers to the Quranic message in more than half the globe.

In the same context, verses affirming that Muhammad has been sent *for all* people[19] have to be understood in a less monopolizing way than they have been throughout the centuries by Muslims with little or no general knowledge about other religions and their distribution. What the Qur'an tells us here is that Islam, unlike Judaism or Hinduism, is a world religion. But it is not denying that Buddhism and Christianity are also world religions, that is, open to everybody, at least in principle. These last words are important, for God *doth what He will*,[20] and our only means of knowing His Will in this respect are by the results.[21] With regard to the world as it has been in its geographical distribution of peoples for the last two thousand years, it will not escape the notice of an observant Muslim any more than an observant Christian that there is, spatially speaking, a certain sector in which Providence has worked wonders for Buddhism and done relatively little for either Christianity or Islam. The same Muslim will also notice that there is another sector in which Providence has worked wonders for Christianity and done very little for the other world religions; and the fact that between these two sectors there is a third in which Islam has been favoured beyond all other religions will not be enough to exonerate him from changing his perspective. For if, as he had been led to believe, God had truly wished Islam (in the

[18] The verse we are considering is parallel to the words of Christ, 'This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world. Then shall the end come,' which likewise admit of both a limited and a universal interpretation, according to what is understood by 'world'. In its wider sense (as well as the narrower one) the first part of this prophecy has now come true inasmuch as every people on earth is now within easy reach of the gospel of the Kingdom, that is, the religion of Truth, in at least one of its modes.

[19] XXXIV, 28.

[20] II, 253.

[21] That is, the great and lasting results which have been put to the test by centuries of time.

narrower sense) to spread over the whole world, why did He construct such impregnable barriers to it in so vast an area?[22]

To take the nearest example, Providence was putting an end to paganism in England at the very time when the Qur'an was being revealed. *The religion of Truth,* in its Christian mode, was being made to *prevail over all religion,* although the idolaters were averse; and since a Divine intervention is never mediocre, Christianity was being established on the firmest foundations, so that not even the Quranic message, at the height of the power of the Islamic civilization, could come near to prevailing against it. And yet it would have been easy for Providence to have waited a few years and converted England to the new religion instead of setting up there such a resistance to it. The answer to the 'problem', if anyone considers it to require an answer, lies in the following verse, which many consider to be among the last Revelations received by the Prophet and which in any case belongs to the period which marks the close of his mission. As such it coincides with a cyclic moment of extreme significance— the last 'opportunity'[23] for a direct message to be sent from Heaven to earth during what remains of this cycle of time. Many of the last Quranic revelations are concerned with completing and perfecting the

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[22] The answer of some Muslim theologians to this question has been, in all seriousness, that Almighty God has evidently decided to send the larger part of humanity astray, and that it is not for us to question His Wisdom. But faith on this basis can never be more than fragmentary. By such logic the mind surreptitiously robs itself of love, while turning a blind eye to some of the most essential Attributes of the Object of love. Another 'explanation', shared also by Christians, *mutatis mutandis,* is that the 'religion of Truth' (understood in a non-universal sense) will in fact finally prevail over the whole world. *Veritas omnia vincit.* But if only one religion had been valid in the eyes of Heaven for the last thousand years or more, the expectation of a sudden total triumph of that true religion at the end of the cycle could not be enough to appease the mind, that is, it could not convincingly 'exonerate' Providence from having allowed false religion to triumph so far and wide for so long.

[23] *God doth what He will.* But it is clearly in the interests of man that a Divine intervention which founds a new religion should be overwhelmingly recognizable as such. The accompanying guarantees must be too tremendous, and too distinctive, to leave room for doubts in any but the most perverse, which means that certain kinds of things must be kept in reserve as the special prerogative of such a period. The Qur'an refers to this 'economy' when it affirms that questions which are put to God during the period of Revelation will be answered (V, 101), the implication being that after the Revelation has been completed, questions will no longer be answered so directly. It is as if a door between Heaven and earth were kept open during the mission of a Divine Messenger, to be closed at all other times.

new religion. But this verse is a final and lasting message for mankind as a whole. The Qur'an expressly addresses the adherents of all the different orthodoxies on earth; and no message could be more relevant to the age in which we live and, in particular, to the mental predicament of man in these later days.

> *For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. And if God* [24] *had willed He would have made you one people. But (He hath willed it otherwise) that He may put you to the test in what He has given you.*[25] *So vie with one another in good works. Unto God will ye be brought back, and He will inform you about that wherein ye differed.*[26]

[24] The change from first to third person with regard to the Divinity is frequent in the Qur'an.
[25] If He had sent only one religion to a world of widely differing affinities and aptitudes, it would not have been a fair test for all. He has therefore sent different religions, specially suited to the needs and characteristics of the different sectors of humanity.
[26] V, 48.

BRILLIANT ANSWERS TO THE WRONG QUESTION

POSTMODERNISM AND THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

Huston Smith

In the wake of its Traditional and Modern periods, the Western world is now generally regarded as having become Postmodern.[27] And as the entire world is still (at this stage) westernizing, I propose to think about religion's relation to Postmodernism. Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed of the University of Cambridge has written a book about *Post modernism and Islam*,[28] but my statement differs from his in two respects. I shall not limit my remarks to Postmodernism's relationship to Islam, and I shall give "post-modern" a different twist from the one he gives it. Because Dr. Ahmed approaches the subject sociologically, his book is really about Postmodern*ity* as a life-style. Postmodern*ism*, by contrast, suggests an outlook: the basic sense of things that gave rise to Postmodernity in the first place and now reflects its way of life.

Of the two, it is (as I say) Postmodernism that is my concern, but because it has become deeply implicated with Postmodernity, I shall summarize Dr. Ahmed's depiction of the latter before I turn to my own project. Instead of defining Postmodernity, he describes it by listing what he takes to be eight of its features.[29]

1. It is animated by a spirit of pluralism, a heightened scepticism of traditional orthodoxies, and a rejection of a view of the world as a universal totality

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[27] I am indebted to Professor M. L. Vanessa Vogel for her helpful suggestions after reading an early draft of this essay.

[28] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[29] *Ibid.* pp. 10-28.

2. It is powered by the media which provide its central dynamic.

3. It is paired with ethno-religious fundamentalism, which it exacerbates where it has not actually generated it.

4. It is bound to its past, even if mainly in protest.

5. It centres in the metropolis.

6. It presupposes democracy, but has a class element. Urban yuppies are its core.

7. It thrives on the juxtaposition of discourses, an exuberant eclecticism, and the mixing of images and media.

8. It is not given to plain and simple language.

In the context of Postmodernity thus described, I proceed now to target Postmodernism, the position that has conceptually parented it.

Contrasts tend to throw things into relief, so I shall define Postmodernism by contrasting it with the traditional and modern outlooks that preceded it, using epistemology as my point of entry.

Even today, when traditional peoples want to know where they are—when they wonder about the ultimate context in which their lives are set and which has the final say over them— they turn to their sacred texts; or in the case of oral, tribal peoples (what comes to the same thing), to the sacred myths that have been handed down to them by their ancestors. *Modernity* was born when a new source of knowledge was discovered, the scientific method. Because its controlled experiment enabled scientists to prove their hypothesis, and because those proven hypotheses demonstrated that they had the power to change the material world dramatically, Westerners turned from revelation to science for the Big Picture. Intellectual historians tell us that by the 19th century Westerners were already more certain that atoms exist than they were confident of any of the distinctive things the Bible speaks of.

This much is straightforward, but it doesn't explain why Westerners aren't still modern rather than Postmodern, for science continues to be the main support of the Western mind. By headcount, most Westerners probably still *are* modern, but I am thinking of frontier thinkers who chart the course that others follow. These thinkers have ceased to be modern because they have seen through the so-called scientific worldview, recognizing it to be not scien*tific* but scien*tistic*. They continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview— not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear.[30]

Where, then, do we now turn for an inclusive worldview? Postmodernism hasn't a clue. And this is its deepest definition.[31] In placing Postmodernism's

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[30] This important point is not generally recognized, so I shall spell it out. The death-knell to modernity, which had science as its source and hope, was sounded with the realization that despite its power in limited regions, six things slip through its controlled experiments in the way sea slips through the nets of fishermen:
1. *Values*. Science can deal with descriptive and instrumental values, but not with intrinsic and normative ones.
2. *Meanings*. Science can work with cognitive meanings, but not with existential meanings (Is X meaningful?), or ultimate ones (What is the meaning of life?).
3. *Purposes*. Science can handle teleonomy– purposiveness in organisms– but not teleology, final causes.
4. *Qualities*. Quantities science is good at, but not qualities.
5. *The invisible and the immaterial*. It can work with invisibles that are rigorously entailed by matter's behaviour (the movements of iron filings that require magnetic fields to account for them, e.g.) but not with others.
6. *Our superiors, if such exist*. This limitation does not prove that beings greater than ourselves exist, but it does leave the question open, for "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence".

[31] Ernest Gellner defines Postmodernism as relativism— "*relativismus über Alles*" (*Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*)— but relativism is not an easy position to defend, so postmoderns do everything they can to avoid that label; Clifford Geertz's "anti-antirelativism" is a case in point. The T-shirts that blossomed on the final day of a six-week, 1987 NEH Institute probably tell the story. Superimposed on a slashed circle, their logo read, "No cheap relativism". By squirming, postmoderns can parry crude relativisms, but sophisticated relativism is still relativism. Postmoderns resist that conclusion, however, so I shall stay with their own self-characterization.

"rejection of the view of the world as a universal totality" first in cataloguing its traits, Dr. Ahmed follows the now generally accepted definition of Postmodernism that Jean-Francois Lyotard fixed in place a decade ago in *The Postmodern Condition*: "incredulity toward metanarratives".[32] Having deserted revelation for science, the West has now abandoned the scientific worldview as well, leaving it without replacement. In this it mirrors the current stage of Western science which leaves *nature* unimaged. Before modern science, Westerners accepted Aristotle's model of the earth as surrounded by concentric, crystalline spheres. Newton replaced that model with his image of a clockwork universe, but Postmodern, quantum-and-relativity science gives us not a third model of nature but no model at all. Alan Wallace's *Choosing Reality* delineates eight different interpretations of quantum physics, all of which can claim the support of physics' proven facts.[33]

An analogy can pull all this together. If we think of traditional peoples as looking out upon the world through the window of revelation (their received myths and sacred texts), the window that they turned to look through in the modern period (science) proved to be stunted. It cuts off at the level of the human nose, which (metaphysically speaking) means that when we look through it our gaze slants downward and we see only things that are inferior to us.[34] As for the Postmodern window, it is boarded over and allows no inclusive view whatsoever. The current issue of *The University of Chicago Magazine* features on its cover a photograph of Richard Rorty announcing that "There is no Big Picture."

This conclusion admits of three versions that grow increasingly shrill. *Minimal*, descriptive Postmodernism rests its case with the fact that today no accepted worldview exists. *Mainline*, doctrinal Postmodernism goes on from there to argue for the permanence of this condition. Never again will we have a worldview of which we can be confident— we know too well how little the human mind can know. Members of this camp disagree as to

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[32] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), pp. xxiv, 3ff.

[33] Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality* (Boston and Shaftsbury: Shambala, 1989).

[34] No textbook in science has ever included things that are intrinsically greater than human beings. Bigger, of course, and wielding more physical power, but not superior in the full sense of that term which includes virtues, such as intelligence, compassion, and bliss.

whether reality has a deep structure to be known, but they agree that if it has, the human mind is incapable of knowing it. *Hardcore*, polemical Postmodernism goes a step further by adding "Good riddance." Worldviews oppress. They totalize, and in doing so marginalize minorities.

These three Postmodern stances set the agenda for the rest of my paper, for I want to argue that the world's religions question the last two, and qualify importantly the first.[35] Negatively, they deny that inclusive views necessarily and preponderantly oppress. Positively, they affirm that the human mind is made for such views, and that reliable ones already exist. Before I enter upon these constructive points, however, I want to take a quick look at recent French philosophy. For though it was mostly the unbridled historicism of German philosophers— Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger— that paved the way for Postmodernism, as our century closes,[36] it is the French who have taken the lead. There is time to mention only one of them, and Jacques Derrida is the obvious candidate for being Postmodernism's most redoubtable spokesman. His deconstructionism is said already to be a mummy in Europe, but in America no one has been able to topple it from its pedestal where it presides, more or less, over the Postmodern scene.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION: DERRIDA AND DECONSTRUCTION

Dr. Ahmed rounded off his characterization of Postmodernity by noting that it is "not given to plain and simple language," and deconstructionist prose reads like a caricature of that point. Derrida calls "stupid" the view that deconstruction "amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language,"[37] but whose fault is this when he ensconces "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*"[38] (there is

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[35] To highlight the opposition between Postmodernism and religion, I am intentionally tabling in this statement the differences among religions that I explored in my *Essays on World Religions* (New York: Paragon House, 1992).

[36] This article was written by the author in 1994. (Ed.)

[37] In Richard Kearney, *Dialogue with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 123-24.

[38] One has to read quite a way to learn that this does not mean what it says. It means [per Rodolphe Gasche, *Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 281] that "nothing outside the text can, like a last reason, assume

nothing outside the text) as the veritable motto of his movement. Even sympathetic interpreters have trouble explaining that motto. John Caputo, for example, assures us that Derrida does not "trap us inside the 'chain of signifiers,' in linguistic-subjective idealism, unable to do anything but play vainly with linguistic strings;" but a page or two later he tells us that "there are no things themselves outside textual and contextual limits, no naked contact with being which somehow shakes loose of the coded system which makes notions like the 'things in them-selves' possible to begin with and which enables speakers to refer to them."[39] Small wonder satirists have a field day. "Deconstruction goes well beyond right-you are-if-you-think-you-are" Walt Anderson reports. "Its message is closer to wrong you are whatever you think, unless you think you're wrong, in which case you may be right— but you don't really mean what you think you do anyway."[40]

I mention this because the costiveness of Derrida's prose makes one wonder if it serves, not to camouflage a leaky theory; I do not say that, but to make it pretentious. Where there is so much mystery, can profundity be lacking? Let us see.

Derrida insists that, contrary to its public image, deconstruction is an affirmative project,[41] for its essence consists of its "openness to the other."[42] John Caputo (upon whom I rely as a helpful interpreter of Derrida) glosses that definition as follows: [43]

> Derrida's thought is through and through a philosophy of "alterity,"...a relentless attentiveness and sensitivity to the 'other.' [It] stands for a kind of hyper-sensitivity to many "others"; the other person, other species,

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a *fulfilling function*," which in itself is not the plainest way of saying that there is nothing outside a text that determines that it has only one plausible meaning.

[39] John Caputo, "Good News about Alterity: Derrida and Theology" in *Faith and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 453.

[40] Walt Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 87.

[41] See Jacques Derrida, "A Number of Yes," translated by Brian Holmes, *Qui Parle* 2 (1988), pp. 120-33.

[42] In Richard Kearney, *op. cit*., p. 124.

[43] John Caputo, ibid.

"man's" other, the other of the West, of Europe, of Being, of the "classic," of philosophy, of reason, etc. [The list goes on].

This understanding of deconstruction helps to situate it in the context of Postmodernism, for if Postmodernism is "incredulity toward metanarratives," Derrida's "openness to the other" fuels that incredulity. For metanarratives brook no alternatives, so that to side finally with "others" is to renounce worldviews.[44]

Let's look, then, at "sensitivity to others" as deconstruction's hallmark. Advancing it as such makes the position attractive, immensely so, for if God is included among the "others," deconstruction (in this reading) sounds a lot like religion, for surely religion's object is to deliver us from narcissistic self-centeredness into the otherness of God and, through God, to other people.[45] Deconstructionist prose swells with virtue, which places its critics in the position of seeming to be either personally insensitive or politically reactionary— the latter, deconstructionists frequently explicitly charge. But the question is: does deconstruction do more than *preach* the empathy we all aspire to? Do its claimed "skills" help us *develop* and *deploy* that virtue? Its theological enthusiasts see in it "a rich and vigorous catalyst for religious thought [for being] an open ended call to let something new come:...an approach that lets faith function with an enhanced sense of advent, gladdened by the good news of alterity by which we are summoned."[46] But this sounds like using the Christian connotations of Advent to bless modern enthusiasms for quantity, the thrill of novelty, and the prospect of progress— the more new arrivals the better. What if the newly welcomed guest turns out to be the Devil in disguise? Should skinhead Neo-Nazis and the Klu Klux Klan be given the same hearing as widows and orphans? Our hearts

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[44] Metanarratives (or worldviews) other than the one in question can exist, but not as such; which is to say, not (from the position of the one in question) as true. Worlds are not made for one another. The words Worldviews, Absolute, and Truth are mutually implicated.

[45] Caputo develops this connection. "Although Derrida is not a religious writer, and does not, as far as I know, hold any religious views, his thought seems to me in no small part driven by a kind of biblical sensitivity, let us say a hyperbolic hypersensitivity, to the demands of the other, to the claims laid upon us by the different one, of the one who is left out or cast out, who lacks a voice or hearing, a standing or stature" (ibid., p. 466).

[46] John Caputo, ibid., p. 454, 457.

invariably go out to the "others" that deconstructionists name, but have they discovered techniques to help us winnow hard cases? A countless number of possible contrasts to (or negations of) the present situation obviously exist. Which ones deserve our attentions?

This is no small question, but the deeper point is this. Deconstruction is first and foremost a theory of language. This should temper our expectations right off, for those theories come and go— structuralism, generative grammar; what will be next? Two things, though, characterize the constant parade. First, the deeper theorists dive into language, the bigger their problems become. A review of Randy Harris' recent book, *The Linguistic Wars*, concludes by quoting a linguist as saying, "You know, language has got us licked. The score is language, one billion, linguists, zero."[47]

The second constant in the ongoing procession of language theories is that it has little effect on the ideas that people use words to shape.[48] Caputo grants this, at least in part.

> To the age old dispute between belief and unbelief, deconstruction comes equipped with a kind of armed neutrality. [It] neither includes nor excludes the existence of any positive entity. There is nothing about deconstruction...that affirms or falsifies the claims of faith; nothing that confirms or denies the claims of physiological reductionists who see there only the marvellous promptings not of the Spirit, but of certain neurotransmitters.[49]

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[47] In David Berreby's review of Randy Allen Harris, *The Linguistic Wars* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) in *The Sciences*, January/February, 1994, p. 49.

[48] There was a dramatic moment in the December 1980 meeting of the American Philosophical Association when Richard Rorty pressed his critics to offer examples of cases "where some philosophical inquiry into conceptual foundations of X provided any furtherance of our understanding of X." Many think that his challenge has not been met, and it is time (it seems to me) to put the same challenge to deconstruction. Confining our self to this essay's concern, is there a single passage in the Hebrew canon (say) whose religious message can be deepened by deploying skills that Derrida possesses, but rabbis through the ages lacked?

[49] John Caputo, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

This claimed neutrality, though, is deceptive, for in our materialistic age, deconstruction's "heightened sense of suspicion about the constructedness of our discourse" (Caputo) works more against intangibles than against neurotransmitters. Practically speaking, this places Derrida in the camp of the massed powers of cognition that oppose the human spirit today. When Saul Bellow tells us that[50]

> the value of literature lies in "true impressions." A novel moves back and forth between the world of objects, of actions, of appearances, and that other world, from which these "true impressions" come and which moves us to believe that the good we hang on to so tenaciously— in the face of evil, so obstinately— is no illusion.

When (as I say) an artist expresses such views, religionists take him at his word, but not Derrida. His "heightened sense of suspicion" will not allow "presences"— his word for Bellow's "true impressions"— to be accepted at face value.[51]

Some things do need to be deconstructed. Scientism needs all the deconstructing it can get, and the Buddha's deconstruction of the empirical ego by showing it to be a composite of *skandas* that derive from *pratitya-samutpada* (co-dependent origination) is a marvel of psychological analysis. But the Buddha tore down in order to rebuild; specifically to show that "utter [phenomenal] groundlessness (nonbeing) is equivalent to full groundedness (being)."[52] Likewise Pseudo-Dionysius. No one saw more clearly than he that "the intelligence must interpret, correct, straighten out, 'reduce', and deny the

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[50] Saul Bellow, *It All Adds Up* (New York: Viking, 1994), p. 97.

[51] This exaltation of method over intuitive discernments is an academic disease of our times: in the case at hand, "presences" are rendered suspect, and confidence is shifted to the deconstructive method. But "if the optic nerve has to be examined in order to be sure that vision is real, it will be necessary to examine that which examines the optic nerve; an absurdity which proves in its own indirect way that knowledge of suprasensible things is intuitive and cannot be other than intuitive." (Frithjof Schuon).

[52] David Loy, "Avoiding the Void: The Lack of Self in Psychotherapy and Buddhism," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology,* vol. 24, no. 2, p. 153.

images, forms, and schemes in which are materially represented the divine realities they are unable to contain." But this "radical critique and rejection by the intelligence of each of the [Divine] names that are more or less accessible to it indicate definite steps *forward* of this same intelligence *in the direction of its own divinization*.[53] One looks in vain for anything approaching such exalted issues from Derrida's dismantlings. They look like the latest brand of our century-long hermeneutics of suspicion, mounted this time linguistically.

I fear that in giving the space that I have to Derrida my wish to come to grips with at least one instance of Postmodernism may have drawn me too far into his circle, for hand to hand combat never avails against these philosophers; their minds are too agile. So before proceeding to Postmodernism's religious alternative, I shall drop my dirk, back off a distance and aim a javelin at the premises from which the philosophers work. For in Yogi Berra's aphorism, they make the wrong mistake. Misjudging what our times require, they provide brilliant answers to the wrong question.

Already at the opening of this century Yeats was warning that things were falling apart, that the centre didn't hold. Gertrude Stein followed him by noting that "in the twentieth century nothing is in agreement with anything else," and Ezra Pound saw man as "hurling himself at indomitable chaos"—the most durable line from the play Green Pastures has been, "Everything that's tied down is coming loose." It is not surprising, therefore, that when in her last interview Rebecca West was asked to name the dominant mood of our time, she replied, "A desperate search for a pattern." The search is desperate because it seems futile to look for a pattern when reality has become, in Roland Barth's vivid image, kaleidoscopic. With every tick of the clock the pieces of experience come down in new array.

This is what we are up against, *this* is what Postmodernity is: the balkanization of life and thought. Perpetual becoming is preying on us like a deadly sickness, and (deaf to E. M. Forster counsel, "only connect") Postmoderns think that more differences, (and the increased fragmentation,

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[53] Rene Roques, preface to *Pseudo-Dionysius* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 7, 6). Emphasis added.

distractions and dispersions these produce) is what we need. If we could replay at fast speed a videotape of our century's social and conceptual earthquakes, we would see the deconstructionists scurrying around like madmen in hardhats, frantically looking for places where a little more demolition and destabilization might prove useful.[54] Here Dr. Ahmed's analysis of Postmodernity fits perfectly, for after defining it as "a rejection of the world as a universal totality," he proceeds immediately to note that "the media provide its central dynamic" Postmodernism and the media reinforce each other through their common interest in difference, for novelty— sequential difference— is the media's life blood. Nothing is so important but that in three days it will not be replaced by headlines reporting what happens next, however trivial it may be. Is anything more interesting than what's going on!

In turning now to Postmodernism's religious alternative, I shall continue to speak of it in the singular and simply assume what I argued in *Forgotten Truth*; namely, that a common metaphysical "spine" underlies the differences in the theologies of the classical languages of the human soul, the world's great religions.[55] Tackling in reverse order the three modes of Postmodernism that I delineated earlier, I shall report as straightforwardly as I can— there won't be much time for supporting arguments— the religious claims that people need worldviews, that reliable ones are possible, and that they already exist.

RELIGION'S RESPONSE TO POST MODERNISM

1. Worldviews are Needed

As religions are worldviews or metanarratives— inclusive posits concerning the ultimate nature of things— its custodians cannot accept polemical Postmodernism's contention that on balance they oppress. George

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[54] "The point of deconstruction is to loosen and unlock structures...to allow [things] to function more freely...open-endedly. It warns against letting [things] close over or shut down, for this would imprison something in systems which struggles to twist free" (Caputo, 456-57). What, specifically?

[55] Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth, The Common Vision of the World's Religions,* Harper San Francisco, San Francisco: 1976/1992 (repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1984, 2002)

Will has observed that "the magic word of modernity is 'society;" and the present case bears him out, for it is almost entirely for their social repercussions that Postmoderns fault worldviews.[56] In applying that measuring rod they simply assume (they do not argue) that religion does more harm than good. That this runs counter to social science functionalism, which holds that institutions don't survive unless they serve social needs, is conveniently overlooked,[57] but the deeper point is that the vertical dimension— the way religion feeds the human soul in its inwardness and solitude— gets little attention.

When the personal and private dimension of life (which intersects the vertical) is validated, it is not difficult to see the function that worldviews serve. Minds require echoniches as much as organisms do, and the mind's echoniche is its worldview, its sense of the whole of things, however much or little that sense is articulated. Short of madness, there is *some* fit between the two, and we constantly try to improve the fit. Signs of a poor fit are the sense of meaninglessness, alienation, and in acute cases anxiety, which Postmodernity knows so well. The proof of a good fit is that life and the world make sense. When the fit feels perfect, the energies of the cosmos pour into the believer and empower him to startling degree. He knows that he belongs, and this produces an inner wholeness that is strong for being consonant with the wholeness of the All. The very notion of an All is a red

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[56] The break up of colonialism following World War II got mixed up with Marx's hermeneutic of suspicion in a curious and unfortunate way. Marx was able to show quite convincingly that much of what capitalists took for truth was actually ideology— but his successors slipped into assuming that because the capitalists thought their truth was objective and they oppressed people, belief in objective truth must be a cause of oppression. No Descartes, no imperialism. There is great irony here, for Marx mounted his hermeneutics of suspicion to clear the ground for his view of things which he considered objective. His stratagems, though, were powerful and took on a life of their own. Eventually, (with help from Nietzsche, Freud, and others) they turned against their fathers by undermining confidence in objective truth generally.
Parenthetically but importantly: that knowledge (to the degree that it is such) is objective, and that objectivity is not fully such if the context that insures it is less than inclusive are momentous points; but in this essay I can only assume them, there being insufficient space to argue for them.

[57] On survival, we have Clifford Geertz's report that "though it is not logically impossible for a people to have [no] metaphysics, we do not seem to have found such a people" ("Ethos, World-View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols", *Antioch Review* [1957], p. 338).

flag to deconstructionists for seeming to disallow alterity; and in a sense it does disallow it, for, being whole, God cannot be exclusive. But as God's inclusiveness is unique in including all the "otherness" there is— God's infinity is all-possibility— alterity is allowed as much room as it can logically have.

One would think that Postmodern theologians, at least, would honour this sense of ultimate belonging that religion bestows. Heirs, though, to modernity, they too have adopted "society" as their watchword, allowing social considerations to upstage ontological ones. Both absolutism and relativism have bright and shadow sides. The virtue of the Absolute is the power it offers the soul; its danger is the fanaticism into which the power can narrow. In the case of relativism, its virtue is tolerance, and nihilism is its shadow side. Where social considerations predominate it is the dark side of absolutism (fanaticism) and the bright side of relativism (tolerance) that are noticed, these being their social components. In both cases, the vertical dimensions— which would reverse our estimates of the two— are underplayed if not ignored.

2. Worldviews are Possible

In proceeding from the need for worldviews to their possibility, I have in mind of course the possibility of *valid* worldviews, not castles in the air. The religious claim that the human mind has access to such views challenges *mainline* Postmodernism in the way its pre-ceding claim— that worldviews are needed— challenged Postmodernism's polemical stance.

Mainline Postmodernism takes its stand on human finitude, arguing that as finite minds are no match for the infinite, there can be no fit between the two. What gets overlooked in this disjunction is the subtleties that finitude admits of: its degrees, modes, and paradoxes. With its *fana, anatta, and may*a, religion ultimately denies that finitude, as such, exists. Postmodernism cannot comprehend that, any more than it can comprehend the other side of the paradox: that finitude hosts the Atman, Buddha-nature, *imago dei*, Uncreated Intellect, and Universal Man. God alone exists, and everything that exists is God.

These are difficult concepts, so I reach for analogies. A wisp of spray is not the ocean, but the two are identically water. Or if we imagine an infinite lump of clay that tapers into tentacles and then into filaments that dwindle toward nothingness, the final tips of those filaments are still clay. To the religious spirit, such thoughts can serve as powerful spring-boards in suggesting our connectedness to God. Which connectedness— this is the immediate point— has epistemic implications. Postmoderns burlesque those who protest the cramped, Postmodern view of the mind, charging them with claiming that the human mind is capable of a God's eye-view of things, as if omniscience were the only alternative to Kant's categories. Worldviews are human views, which means that they conform to human modes of thought in the way a bird's-eye view of the world honours its modes. But Blake's dictum is decisive here: "I see through my eyes, not with them." That the world, taken as the whole of things, looks different to God and other species than it does to us does not prevent there being better and worse, right and wrong ways that human beings take it to be. In a subordinate sense, the right way includes many right ways— as many as appropriately different ways of being human decree. Differences in the world's great theologies provide an important instance of this, but here the point is that mistakes are possible and do occur, Postmodernism being one of them.

The components of Postmodern epistemology that work most heavily to obscure the realization that there can be valid overviews are two: perspectivalism carried to the point of absurdity; and a mundane, humdrum conception of knowledge.[58]

Perspectivalism becomes absurd when the obvious fact that we look at the world from different places, hence different angles, is transformed into the dogma that we therefore cannot know things as they actually are. For Kant, it was our human angle (the categories of the mind) that prevents us from knowing "things in themselves;" and when psychological, cultural, temporal, and linguistic filters are added to this generic, anthropological one, we get constructivism, cultural relativism, historicism, and cultural-linguistic

[58] For a reasoned presentation of these two important points which I can only mention here, see the section titled "Two Dogmas of Scepticism Concerning Spiritual Reality," in Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993).

holism respectively. What dogmatic perspectivalism in all these modes overlooks is that to recognize that perspectives are such requires knowing to some extent the wholes that demote them to that status. Without this recognition, each "take" (as they say in movie making) would be accepted as the thing in itself. Visually, we need only move around the room to get a sense of the whole that shows our perspectives to be no more than such; but the mind is a dexterous instrument and can put itself "in other peoples' shoes," as we say.[59] When the shoes belong to strangers, we transcend cultural relativism; when they are removed in time we transcend all-or-nothing historicism. When this is pointed out to Postmoderns they again burlesque, charging their informants with claiming to be able to climb out of their skins, or (in the case of time) hopping a helicopter for past epochs. Both images are self-serving by pointing their spatial analogies in the wrong direction. The alternative to perspectivalism is not to get out of one-self or one's times, but to go into oneself until one reaches things that are time*less* and elude space altogether.

As for Postmodern epistemology, this too was initiated by Kant who argued that knowledge is always a synthesis of our concepts with something that presents itself to those concepts. (We can think of a tree as an object without knowing whether there is such an object until we confront something that fits our concept of a tree). An important question for worldviews is whether human beings have faculties, analogous to their sense receptors, for detecting immaterial, spiritual objects. Kant thought not, and epistemology has largely gone along with his opinion; but religion disagrees. There is no objective way of adjudicating the dispute, for each side has its own definition of objectivity. For science, common sense, and Postmodernism, objective knowledge where it is countenanced is knowledge

[59] This, of course, is precisely what Postmodern anthropologists deny. The discipline that began as the effort to learn about other peoples and cultures now obsesses over the impossibility of that project. Anthropologists now evidence their seriousness by recognizing that "facts" about other peoples are only superficially such. When the ever-shifting, culture-bound, contradictory and deserving-of-deconstruction meanings of the natives interface with the anthropologists' meanings that partake of the same problems, what hope is there for minds to meet? Those who seek such meetings are reduced to reporting the anguish of their field experiences in which they and their subjects try to break out of their respective islands and reach out to one another, with failure built into the project from its start.

that commends itself to everyone because it turns, finally, on sense reports that people agree on. Religious epistemology, on the other hand, defines objective knowledge as adequation to the real. When the real in question is spiritual in character, special faculties are required. These need to be developed and kept in working order.

Unencumbered by run-of-the-mill epistemology and perspectivalism gone haywire, religions accept their worldviews as their absolutes, which is to say, as true. That word is no more acceptable to post-moderns than "all" is; Wittgenstein prefigured the shift from modernity to Postmodernity when he characterized his turn from his early to his late period as a shift from truth to meaning. Here again the post-modern preoccupation with social matters obtrudes, for the fanatical impulse to cram truth down other people's throats leads Postmoderns to back off from truth in general, especially if it is capitalized. In so doing they overlook the fact that truth is falliblism's prerequisite, not its alternative. Where there is no via (way, truth) to deviate from, mistakes have no meaning.[60]

Working my way backwards through Postmodernism's three versions, I come lastly to its minimal claim which simply reports that we have no believable worldview today. "We have no maps, and we don't know how to make them" is the way one of the author's of *The Good Society* states the point.[61]

Whereas the two stronger versions of post-modernism need to be challenged for interfering with the human spirit, this minimalist position, being at the root a description, poses no real problem. The description can, though, be qualified somewhat. In saying that we have no maps, the "we" in the minimalist's assertion refers to Western intellectuals. Peoples whose minds have not been reshaped by modernity and its sequel continue to live by the maps of their revelations.

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[60] Robert Kane's *Through the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World* (New York: Paragon House, 1994) makes this point convincingly.

[61] Richard Madsen, one of the authors of *The Good Society*, Robert Bellah et al. (New York: Knopf, 1991).

Prone to assume that maps must be believed fanatically if they are to be believed at all, polemical Postmoderns condemn religions for fomenting disharmony. But it is useful here to refer back for a last time to Dr Ahmed's characterizations of Postmodernity, which include its being "paired with ethno-religious fundamentalism". Postmoderns over-look that pairing. They do not perceive the extent to which their styles of thought (with the dangers of relativism and nihilism they conceal) have *produced* fundamentalism; which fundamentalism is the breeding ground for the fanaticism and intolerance they rightly deplore.

If mainline and polemical Postmodernism were to recede, the obsession with life's social dimension that they saddled us with would relax and we would find ourselves able to think ontologically again. An important consequence of this would be that we would then perceive how much religious outlooks have in common. For one thing, they all situate the manifest, visible world within a larger, invisible whole. This is of particular interest at the moment because currently science does the same. Dark matter doesn't impact any of science's detectors, and the current recipe for the universe is "70 parts cold dark matter, about 30 parts hot dark matter, and just a pinch for all the rest— the matter detectable to scientific instruments."[62] The further unanimous claim of religious cosmologies, though, finds no echo in science, for (being a value judgement) it is beyond science's reach. Not only is the invisible real; regions of it are more real and of greater worth than the visible, material world.

The inclusive, presiding paradigm for traditional cosmologies is the Great Chain of Being, composed of links ranging in hierarchical order from meagre existents up to the *ens perfectissimum*; and the foremost student of that concept, Arthur Lovejoy, reported that "most educated persons everywhere accepted [it] without question down to late in the eighteenth century."[63] To that

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[62] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 October 1992, A 16.

[63] Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 59. Ernst Cassirer corroborates Lovejoy on this point: "The most important legacy of ancient speculation was the concept and general picture of a graduated cosmos" (*Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 9).

endorsement, Ken Wilber has recently added that the Great Chain of Being is "so overwhelmingly widespread...that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history— an error so colossally widespread as to literally stagger the mind— or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear."[64]

CONCLUSION

To propose that religions cash in their theological metanarratives for metaphysical similarities they share would be as absurd as to urge people to peel off their flesh so the similarities of their skeletons could come to light. But if the warfare between science and religion could wind down, religions might find themselves co-existing relatively happily within a minimally articulated metanarrative of faith that encompassed them all in the way the eight current models of the quantum world share the context of what quantum physicists in general agree on. Or in the way in which, in the modern period, competing scientific theories shared the metanarrative of the scientific worldview.

Were this to happen, the atmosphere would be more salubrious, for I know no one who thinks that the Postmodern view of the self and its world are nobler than the ones that the world's religions proclaim. Postmoderns acquiesce to their dilapidated views, not because they like them, but because they think that reason and human historicity now force them upon us.

It has been the burden of my remarks that this is not the case.

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[64] Ken Wilber, "The Great Chain of Being," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 33 no. 3 (summer 1993), p. 53.

ISLAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS: THE UNIVERSALITY AND PARTICULARITY OF PROPHECY

William C. Chittick

Prophecy is the means whereby God offers guidance to human beings through human intermediaries. Just as God's mercy takes precedence over his wrath and thereby determines the nature of wrath, so also God's guidance takes precedence over his misguidance. Guidance itself demands the existence of misguidance. Without the misguidance that is embodied by Satan, the prophetic messages would be meaningless. Without distance, there can be no nearness; without wrong, no right; without darkness, no perception of light. All the distinctions that allow for a cosmos to exist depend upon the diversification and differentiation of the divine qualities. On the moral and spiritual level, this diversification becomes manifest through the paths of guidance and misguidance, represented by the prophets and the satans.

Wherever there have been prophets, there have been satans. The Qur'an uses the word satans to refer both to some of the jinn and to some human beings. To be a satan is to be an enemy of the prophets and an embodiment of misguidance:

> *We have appointed to every prophet an enemy-satans from among mankind and jinn, revealing fancy words to each other as delusion. Yet, had thy Lord willed, they would never haw done it. So leave them with what they are fabricating. (6:112)*

Just as Adam, our father and the first prophet, was faced with Iblis, so also we are faced with Iblis, his offspring, and their followers. Misguidance is a universal phenomenon, found in the outside world and within ourselves. In the same way, guidance is a universal phenomenon. In other words, the human race is inconceivable without both prophets and satans, because human beings are defined by the freedom they received when they were made in the divine form. They are able to choose among the divine

attributes, because all the divine attributes are found within themselves. Just as they can choose God's right hand by following guidance, so also they can choose his left hand by following misguidance. Without that choice, they would not have been free to accept the Trust.

As we have seen,[65] the fundamental message of the prophets is *tawhid*. In the Islamic perspective, all prophets have brought the first Shahadah: "We never sent a messenger before thee save that We revealed to him, saying, There is no god but I, so worship Me"' (21:25). In contrast to the first Shahadah, which designates a divine guidance that is embodied by all prophets, the second Shahadah refers to the domain of the specific message brought by Muhammad. Other prophets had their own messages that correspond to the second Shahadah:

> *Every nation has its messenger.* (10:47)
>
> *We have sent no messenger saw with the tongue of his people.* (14:4)
>
> *To every one of you [messengers] We have appointed a right way and an open road.* (5:48)

The Qur'an insists that Muslims should not differentiate among the prophets of God. Each prophet, after all, was sent by God with guidance, and the primary message of each is the same:

> *Say: We haw faith in God, and in that which has been sent down on Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and to Him we have submitted* (2:136; cf. 2:285, 3:84)

The Qur'an tells us in several verses that the later prophets came to confirm the messages of the earlier prophets:

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[65] This extract is from Dr. Chittick's illuminating study of the Islamic Tradition, *The Vision of Islam*, Paragon House, 1994, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000, pp. 164-175. (Ed.)

And when Jesus son of Mary said, "Children of Israel, I am indeed God's messenger to you, confirming the Torah that has gone before me. . . ." (61:6)

He has sent down upon thee the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as guidance to the people. (3:3)

At the same time, the Qur'an makes clear that the details of the messages differ. Any distinction that can be made among the messengers has to be made on the basis of the difference in their messages:

And those messengers— some We have preferred above others. Among them was he to whom God spoke, and He raised some in degrees. And We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear explications, and We confirmed him with the Holy Spirit (2:253)

And We haw preferred some prophets over others, and We gave David the Psalms. (17:55)

The idea that every messenger comes with a message that is specific to the people to whom he was sent and that differs in details from other messages is deeply rooted in the Islamic consciousness and is reflected in the titles that are customarily given to the great messengers in Islamic texts. Each title designates the special quality of the messenger that distinguishes him from other messengers. Thus, one of the verses just quoted refers to him "to whom God spoke." Most commentators think that this is a reference to Moses, to whom Islamic sources give the title *kalim* (speaking companion), because God spoke to him from the burning bush without the intermediary of Gabriel, and because the Qur'an says, "And unto Moses We spoke directly" (4:164). But the commentators add that it may also refer to Adam, to whom God spoke in the Garden, and to Muhammad, to whom God spoke during Muhammad's ascent to God (the *mi'raj*). In a similar way, Jesus is usually called God's "spirit" and Abraham his "close friend" (*khalil*).

In Islamic countries, especially among people untouched by modern education, there is a common belief that all religions accept the first Shahadah, but that each religion has a specific second Shahadah that differs from that of the Muslims. Thus it is thought that the Christians say, "There is

no god but God and Jesus is the spirit of God," while the Jews say, "There is no god but God and Moses is God's speaking companion."

The Qur'an recognizes explicitly that, although the first Shahadah never changes, the domain covered by the second Shahadah differs from message to message. Hence, all the laws that are proper to Jews, for example, are not necessarily proper for Christians, nor do the rulings of the Muslim Shari'ah have any universality (despite the claims of some Muslims). For example, in the following verse, God explains that the Jews have prohibitions that do not apply to Muslims:

> *And to the Jewry We haw forbidden every beast with claws; and of oxen and sheep We have forbidden them the fat of them, saw what their backs carry, or their entrails, or what is mingled with the bone.* (6:146)

Similarly, the Qur'an places the following words, which are directed at the Children of Israel, in Jesus' mouth, thus indicating that his Shari'ah differs from that of Moses.

> *[I have been sent] to confirm the truth of the Torah that is before me, and to make lawful to you certain things that before were forbidden unto you.* (3:50)

An often recited prayer at the end of Sura 2 of the Qur'an says, "Our Lord . . .. charge us not with a burden such as Thou didst lay upon those before us" (2:286). The commentators say that this refers to the Torah, which is a heavy burden, in contrast to the Muslim Shari'ah, which, in the words of a hadith, is "easy, congenial" (*sahl*, *samh*).

One of the most delightful expressions of the differing messages entrusted to the prophets is found in the standard accounts of the Prophet's ascent to God, the *mi'raj*. As we saw earlier, Muhammad met a number of prophets on his way up through the heavens. When he met God, God gave him instructions for his community. On the way back down, Muhammad stopped in each heaven to bid farewell to the prophets. In the sixth heaven, right below the seventh, he met Moses. Moses asked him what sort of acts of worship God had given him for his community. He replied that God had given him fifty *salats* per day. Moses told him that he had better go back and

ask God to lighten the burden. He knew from sorry experience that the people would not be able to carry out such difficult instructions. The Prophet continues:

> *I went back, and when He had reduced them by ten, I returned to Moses. Moses said the same as before, so I went back, and when He had reduced them by ten more, I returned to Moses...*

Finally, after Muhammad had moved back and forth between God and Moses several times, God reduced the *salats* to five. Moses then said to Muhammad:

> *Your people are not capable of observing five salats. I have tested people before your time and have laboured earnestly to prevail over the Children of Israel. So go back to your Lord and ask Him to make things lighter for your people.*

But by this point, the Prophet was too embarrassed to continue asking for reductions. Hence he said: "I have asked my Lord till I am ashamed, but now I am satisfied and I submit."

Nowadays, discussion of Islamic teachings about prophecy can quickly raise emotions among Muslims. Probably the main reason for this is that in many Islamic countries, religion plays a far greater role in daily life than it does in Europe and America. Hence, generally speaking, political positions are posed in religious terms, and opposition to the policies of other countries can take the form of criticism of other religions.

A second factor that helps keep emotions high in discussions of prophecy is that modernized Muslims commonly take the attitude— as do many people in the West as well— that it is not they who are at fault. Shortcomings must belong to other people, and so whatever the problem may be, the blame must lie in the opponent's court. This attitude is common throughout the world. For those who recognize the truth of myth, it is highly significant that Iblis was the first person to put the blame in the other's court. It is he who said, "Now, because You have led me astray…." (7:16). If people followed the example of Adam and Eve, they would look more closely at themselves and find room to recognize that "We have wronged ourselves" (7:23).

Do not think that Iblis's position is found only in politics. It is an everyday reality for all of us. For example, think about the way in which students react when they receive their grades. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I got an A in physics, but that lousy English teacher gave me a C." This is Iblis's reaction— the light is mine, but he led me astray. I did good, but any evil is someone else's fault. The reaction of Adam and Eve would be the following: "How kind of that physics teacher to give me an A, but I really messed up in English and received a C-, so I will have to work much harder to make up for my own shortcomings."

In short, in the contemporary political situation, ideology is often posed in terms of the war of good against evil. In such a situation, those who would stress the universality of the Qur'anic message rarely meet with much success. It is too easy to think that the other guy is at fault and we are fine. And in order to think that way, it is necessary to forget that God's mercy extends to all creatures. If people did remember that God's mercy takes precedence over his wrath, they might have to start searching for faults in themselves and to leave the others to God. They might have to accept that the C- was a gift and that they should have flunked.

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

The Qur'anic depiction of the role of prophets in human history is highly nuanced. On the basis of the Qur'anic text, we can neither claim that Islam has exclusive rights to the truth nor that other religions are valid without qualification. Rather, all prophets have come with the truth from God, but their followers do not always observe the teachings that the prophets brought. Hence, the Qur'an frequently criticizes the followers of the two religions with which the early Muslim community had contact, Judaism and Christianity. It maintains that many Jews and Christians have not lived up to God's message to them, a point that has been made by Jewish and Christian reformers throughout history.

Many Muslims would like to make this a universal judgment against other religions, claiming that Islam is the only valid religion left on the face of the earth and forgetting that there is no reason to suppose that Islam is exempt from the same sorts of distortion. Other Muslims do not agree with the

sweeping condemnations that fundamentalists of all religious persuasions issue against their perceived enemies. There is, in short, no consensus among contemporary or past Muslims on the issue of Islam and other religions. But the Qur'an and the classical commentaries offer plenty of room for a view of things that is full of subtlety and nuance.

Among the general statements the Qur'an makes about the religions brought by the prophets is the following, found in two places in the text:

> *Those who haw faith, and those of the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans— whoso has faith in God and the Last Day and works wholesome deeds-their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be upon them, neither shall they sorrow.* (2:62, 5:69)

The key issue here, as should be obvious by now, is faith in God. In the Islamic view, faith in God demands *tawhid*, and *tawhid* is the message of all the prophets. To the extent that *tawhid* is established, salvation is assured. So important is the first Shahadah, through which *tawhid* is expressed, that a hadith found in one of the most reliable sources tells us, "He who dies knowing that there is no god but God will enter the Garden." Notice that this hadith does not even mention faith. Simply to know the truth of *tawhid* is sufficient. Another hadith makes a similar point. On the day of resurrection, God will busy himself with weighing good and evil deeds in the scales. The good deeds of each person will be put in one pan and the evil deeds in the other. If good deeds predominate, the person will go to paradise, but if evil deeds predominate, he or she will be thrown into hell. One of the people brought to be judged will be a Muslim who has ninety-nine scrolls listing his evil deeds:

> *God will say, "Do you object to anything in this? Haw My scribes who keep note wronged you?"*
>
> *He will reply, No, my Lord."*
>
> *God will ask him if he has any excuse, and when he tells his Lord that he has none, He will say, 'On the contrary, you have with Us one good deed, and you will not be wronged today."*

A document will be brought out containing "I witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger." God will say, "Come to be weighed."

The man will ask his Lord what this document is that is being brought along with the scrolls, and He will reply, "You will not be wronged."

The scrolls will then be put on one side of the scale, and the document on the other, and the scrolls will become light and the document heavy, for nothing can compare in weight with God's name.

When the Qur'an criticizes the followers of other religions, it is criticizing a perceived distortion of *tawhid*. In doing so, it has recourse to versions of Christian and Jewish teachings to which the followers of those religions do not necessarily subscribe.

To take a simple example, it is commonly said that the Qur'an rejects the Christian concept of the Trinity. Inasmuch as the Trinity is understood as negating *tawhid*, this is true. But not all Christians think that the Trinity negates *tawhid*. Quite the contrary, most formulations of the Trinitarian doctrine are careful to preserve God's unity. If "threeness" takes precedence over oneness, then the Qur'anic criticisms apply. But among Christians, the exact nature of the relationship between the three and the one is a point of recurring debate. One of the actual Qur'anic verses that are taken as negating the Trinity says, "Those who say, 'God is the third of three' have become truth-concealers" (5:73). Even an elementary knowledge of any Christian catechism tells us that God is not "the third of three." Rather, God is one and three at the same time. Inasmuch as he is three, he presents himself to his creatures as three persons— Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Another Qur'anic verse says something similar, but now we have this first verse to help us understand what is being criticized:

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So haw faith in God and His messengers, and do not say, 'Three." Refrain; better it is for you. God is only One God. (4:171)

Notice that this passage gives Jesus an extremely exalted position and recognizes that he has qualities possessed by no other prophet.[66] However, it stresses once again that there is but a single God. If faith in Jesus leads to the affirmation of three gods, then the Qur'an rejects that. But again, the actual Christian position is highly subtle, and few if any Christians would hold that they have faith in other than a single God.

Some Muslim commentators point out that there is nothing wrong in saying "three" so long as it does not mean that God is the *third of three*. If we say that God is the third of *two*, that is fine. The Qur'an itself says as much:

> *Hast thou not seen that God knows whatsoever is in the heavens, and whatsoever is in the earth? Three men conspire not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them, neither five men, but He is the sixth of them, neither fewer than that, neither more than that, but He is with them, wherever they may be. Then He shall tell them what they haw done, on the Day of Resurrection. Surely God has knowledge of everything.* (58:7)

Another Christian concept that the Qur'an criticizes vehemently is that Jesus should be God's son. The verse just cited that negates "three" continues by saying, "Glory be to Him— that He should have a son!" (4:171). Elsewhere the Qur'an says, "How should He have a son, seeing that He has no female companion, and He created all things, and He has knowledge of everything?" (6:102).

Qur'anic usage and the general Muslim understanding make clear that by son, Muslims understand not a symbol or a metaphor, but a physical son, born of a mother, God's supposed female companion. It may be that some Christians have thought that God has taken a wife, or that he somehow impregnated the Virgin Mary, giving birth to his son. But no Christian theologian has ever imagined such a thing. For Christians, Jesus' sonship is a reality, but it cannot be taken in a physical sense. The fact that Mary is often called the Mother of God does not help clear up the matter for Muslims,

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[66] See the readable and informative study by H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

who have only the Qur'anic text and popular misconceptions of an alien religion to go by.

That the idea of sonship is understood by Muslims in a literal sense is obvious, for example, in the short text of Sura 112, often called *Tawhid*. Anyone who thinks about the implications of sonship and fatherhood will quickly understand that these are relative terms. Everyone who is a son is also (potentially at least) a father, and everyone who is a father is also a son, with the sole exception of Adam. Notice that in affirming *tawhid*, the Qur'an not only negates the idea that Jesus could have been God's son, but also the necessary correlative, that God could have been someone else's son, surely the ultimate absurdity in Muslim eyes:

> *Say: He is God, One-God, the Everlasting Refuge. He did not give birth, nor was He given birth to, and He has no equal.*

Another very commonly repeated Qur'anic criticism of Jews and Christians is that they have corrupted their scriptures and therefore invalidated the messages brought to them by the prophets. The Qur'anic text, however, offers a more ambiguous answer to the question of other scriptures than Muslims may admit. The key Arabic term is *tahrif*, which means to turn something from its proper way, to distort, to alter. Do the following Qur'anic verses refer to the actual text of the scriptures, or do they refer to the interpretation of the scriptures? Qur'an commentators take both positions, thus allowing Muslims various alternatives in their attempts to understand the significance of the passage (we translate *tahrif* as "alter"):

> *Some of the Jews altered words from their meanings, saying, 'We have heard and we disobey". . . . Had they but said, 'We hear and we obey,". . . it would have been better for them.* (4:46)

Notice that in this verse, the Qur'an does not make a universal judgment, but rather criticizes some followers of the Jewish religion. If the point is interpretation, no one could take exception to this statement, since followers of every religion recognize that some of their co-religionists distort the meaning of scripture. Another verse is as follows:

So, because [the Jews] broke their compact, We cursed them and made their hearts hard, they alter words from their meanings, and they haw forgotten a portion of what they were reminded of. (5:13)

Here, the Qur'an connects the issue of textual distortion with guidance and misguidance. Those Jews who broke their covenant with God suffered hardening of their hearts as a divine punishment. Hardening of the heart is a term that the Qur'an employs to refer to all the consequences of turning away from God. In general, it signifies a dulling of the intelligence and a weakening of the connection with the divine attributes of gentleness, mercy, and beauty. Those whose hearts became hardened fell into further distance from God and greater misguidance. Hence, they began to pervert the meaning of their own scriptures. The prophets had come to remind them, but they forgot some of what the prophets had told them. Their act of forgetting could possibly mean that some of the scripture was lost, but more likely it simply means that those with hardened hearts were unable to understand the meaning of the remembrance; that the divine message embodied in scripture.

In another verse on the same subject, the Qur'an addresses the Prophet, telling him not to be so eager for the Jews in his environment to listen to his message:

Art thou then so eager that they should have faith in thee? But there was a group among them who listened to the Speech of God, then altered it knowingly, having understood it. (2:75)

This verse suggests that accepting Islam is not sufficient, if old habits such as reading scripture to one's own advantage are maintained. But again, this verse refers to "a group of them," not to all Jews.

Some of the polemically minded Muslim theologians investigated the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament looking for evidence that Jews and Christians had distorted the text of their scriptures. The first to do this, and the one was the most thorough and systematic in his approach, was the Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064). Given that the Islamic concept of scripture diverges from the Jewish and Christian idea in important

respects, and given that the Jewish and Christian canons include a great variety of texts written at many different times and from many different perspectives, it is not surprising that the Muslim scholars found much to criticize. Moreover, these critics were often simply repeating what is found in polemical literature written by Jews and Christian sectarians, or by other, often pre-Islamic, critics of the Bible, who may have been Samaritans, Jewish-Christians, Karaites, Gnostics, Hellenistic philosophers, or Manicheans. Some historians of Islam have even suggested that the modem critical study of the Bible— which, of course, has been far more severe on the Bible than Muslims have— received many of its ideas through the intermediary of the Islamic polemical literature.[67]

The Qur'an commonly refers to the messages given to messengers as 'books"; that is, scriptures. Hence, it refers to the followers of a messenger as "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitab*). In most of the thirty verses where the Qur'an employs this expression, it seems to have in view the Christians and the Jews, the followers of the two religions with which the nascent Muslim community had contact. In two verses, it also mentions the "People of the Reminder" in the same meaning.

In many of the verses where the People of the Book are mentioned, the two sides of the Qur'anic picture of pre-Islamic religion can easily be seen. Those who observe their scriptures are praiseworthy, while those who do not follow the messages that the prophets delivered to them are blameworthy:

> *Many of the People of the Book wish that they might restore you as truth-concealers, after your faith, because of the envy in their souls.* (2:109)

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[67] Christians are often struck by this and other Qur'anic passages about Jesus, and some of the evangelically minded among them would like to find here an opening to convert Muslims to the right religion (i.e., their version of Christianity). The typical Muslim response, however, is a yawn. They cannot get excited about any human qualities when "There is nothing real but the Real." After all, they say, so what if Jesus was born of a virgin? That does not make him divine. Adam was created without father or mother, so that should place him a notch above Jesus. The Qur'an itself compares Jesus to Adam: "Surely the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness. He created him of dust, then said unto him Be! and he was" (3:59).

Some of the People of the Book are a wholesome nation. They recite God's signs in the watches of the night, prostrating themselves, having faith in God and the Last Day, bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour, and vying with one another in good deeds. They are among the wholesome. Whatever good they do, they will not be denied its reward. (3:113-115)

The Qur'an is especially critical of the enmity that Christians and Jews have toward each other. Since they accept the Book— *tawhid* and prophecy— they should not quarrel. The first verse cited is especially interesting, since it makes a general criticism of all those who would say that Judaism and Christianity have no foundation:

The Jews say, "The Christians stand on nothing." The Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing." But they recite the Book. Even so, those who haw no knowledge say the like of what they say. (2:113)

Say: "O People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and that we associate no others with Him, and that some of us do not take others as lords, apart from God." And if they turn their backs, say: "Bear witness that we are muslims."

People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, until after him. What, have you no intelligence? (3:64-65)

There are many more verses of the Qur'an that refer to Christianity and Judaism, but a thorough analysis would demand a major book. Enough has been said to provide the general picture.[68]

One more point, however, needs to be made in order to clarify a major difference in perspective between the Muslim and Christian view of things.

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[68] Excellent recent studies on the Islamic understanding of Christianity include Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991).

For Christians, God's word is Christ, the "Word made flesh." The Gospels are inspired books written about Christ. The whole New Testament can take on the colour of God's word, but all this is secondary to Christ, who is the word incarnate. One can imagine a Christianity without the New Testament, sustained merely by an oral tradition. But one cannot imagine a Christianity without Christ.

For Muslims, God's Word is the Qur'an, and Muhammad is simply the messenger. True, he is a perfect human being, God's vicegerent, and the model that God has designated for people to follow. But the message is the primary issue, not the messenger. One can imagine Islam without Muhammad, but not without the Qur'an.

Muslims see other religions in terms of Islam, which in their eyes is the perfect religion. Of course, followers of other religions also look from their own perspective; this is not a quality unique to Muslims. Hence, Muslims expect other religions to have a book like the Qur'an, and the Qur'an provides every reason for them to do so by referring to the Torah and the Gospel. But note that the Qur'an mentions Gospel in the singular, not in the plural. It states repeatedly that Jesus, Gods messenger, was given the Gospel as his message, just as Muhammad was given the Qur'an. Hence, Muslims are immediately suspicious when they hear that there are four Gospels. This difference of perspective on the role of the human and scriptural elements makes for endless misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims.

In order to sum up the Islamic view of other religions— Judaism and Christianity in particular— we can say the following: In reading the Qur'an, many Muslims prefer to stress the passages that are critical of other religions and to ignore or explain away the verses that praise other religions. It cannot be denied that certain Qur'anic verses provide a strong case for religious exclusivism. However, many Qur'anic verses leave plenty of room for openness toward other religions. The position Muslims take on this issue depends largely on their own understanding of God's reality. Those who think that God's mercy really does take precedence over his wrath and embraces all those who try to follow his guidance find it easy to see God's guidance in all religions. In contrast, those who prefer to think of God as a

stern and somewhat capricious master who issues orders and expects to be obeyed— no questions asked— are much more comfortable thinking that only they (their religious group, their political party) are among the saved.

Sometimes the best way to approach claims regarding exclusive possession of the truth is simply to laugh and to leave things in God's hands. Thus we conclude this section with an anecdote, told to us by one of the ulama many years ago.

Two Iranian scholars were discussing religion. One of them asked the other, "In the last analysis, who goes to paradise?" The other, a poet well known for his sense of humour, answered, "Well, it is really very simple. First, all religions other than Islam are obviously false, so we do not have to consider them. That leaves Islam. But among Muslims, some are Shi'ites and some Sunnis, and we all know that the Sunnis have strayed from the right path and will be thrown into hell. That leaves the Shi'ites. But among Shi'ites, there are the common people and the ulama. Everyone knows that the common people don't care about God and religion, so they will burn in the Fire. That leaves the ulama. But the ulama have become ulama in order to lord it over the common people. That leaves you and me. And I am not so sure about you."

Doesn't this kind of reasoning sound familiar? It is perhaps not wildly inaccurate to say that many of our contemporaries think this way, whether they be Muslims, Christians, Jews, scholars, scientists, politicians, or whatever. And this sort of position sounds suspiciously like that of Iblis, whose motto is, "I am better than he."

ILLUMINATION AND NON-DELIMITATION

LESSONS FOR INTER AND INTRA FAITH DIALOGUE FROM THE WISDOM OF THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

Reza Shah Kazmi

The starting point for the reflections presented in this paper is the monastery of St Catherine at Sinai. This monastery has the distinction of being the oldest continually inhabited monastic establishment in Christendom. It not only exists as a witness to the continuing dynamism of the contemplative ideal in our days in the sister faith/wisdom tradition of Christianity but also offers a concrete evidence of the inter-religious co-existence— indeed harmony— that has permitted it to remain unmolested in its overwhelmingly Muslim environment for close to fourteen centuries.

Two vivid symbols of this harmony are to be found within the walls of the monastery: the first is a mosque, built by the monks for the Bedouins; and the second is the famous charter of protection granted by the Prophet to the monastery. The monks themselves are convinced that this charter, sealed with an imprint of the Prophet's own hand, was instrumental in maintaining the safety and security of the monastery. The original document was written in Kufic script by Sayyidina 'Ali, and taken by the Ottoman Sultan Selim back to Istanbul in the 16th century. The Ottoman copy of the original is on display at the monastery.

It is indeed a precious and remarkable document. Historians are somewhat divided over its authenticity, some claiming that it was in fact composed by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (ruled 996-1021). For our part, we agree with the opinion of the Greek historian, Amantos, who writes, "The monastery of Sinai could not possibly have survived without the protection afforded by Mohammed and his successors ... Moreover, the great number of decrees which the Mohammedan [sic.] rulers of Egypt issued confirming the protected status of the monastery must have resulted from the fact that

Mohammed himself had granted protection to Sinai." [69]

The document itself goes beyond merely granting formal protection. It states that wherever monks or hermits are to be found, on any mountain, hill, village, or other habitable place, on the sea or in the deserts or in any convent, church or house of prayer, I shall be watching over them as their protector, with all my soul, together with all my *ummah*; because they [the monks and hermits] are a part of my own people, and part of those protected by me.'

It goes on to state their exemption from taxes and warns of stern retribution if the injunctions of the charter are broken by Muslims. Also, most significantly, it makes it incumbent on the Muslims not only to protect the monks, but also, in regard to Christians generally, to 'consolidate their worship at Church'.

This points to the deeper significance of the document, and can be seen as a direct expression of the Qur'anic verse which is also cited in the charter: *Discourse not with them* [the people of the Book] *except in that which is finest* [70]— this last word translating *ahsan,* that which is most excellent, indeed, most 'beautiful', taking into account the root of the word, *hasuna,* to be beautiful.

All of us are no doubt aware that the legal protection of the People of the Book is enshrined in the Islamic revelation itself, and it is based on the unity of the Abrahamic message. This unity of essence transcends the differences between the faith-communities making up the Abrahamic family. But the question to be posed here is this: how much diversity can this family tolerate before it begins to disintegrate? One resoundingly positive answer to this question takes its inspiration from the Prophet's Charter to St Catherine's monastery. For this charter can be read as an eloquent symbol of the Muslim

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[69] Cited by Athanasios Paliouras, *St Catherine's Monastery* (Sinai: Hiera Mani Sina, E. Tzaferi, 1985), p. 16. Kurt Weizmann points out that the Muslim protection of the monastery is one among many examples of the tradition of tolerance manifested by Muslims towards minority faiths in their midst. See his essay, "The History" in J. Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St Catherine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), p. 13.

[70] Surat al-'Ankabut, XXIX: 46. Cf: Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and hold discourse with them in the finest manner ... (Surat al-Nakhl, XVI: 125)

respect for, not only the religion of Christianity in general, but the monastic ideal in particular. In other words, it can be seen, literally, as a 'seal' of approval of a way of life that appears on the surface to be at the very antipodes of the Islamic ideal.

A superficial response to the Prophet's Charter, based on a conventional Muslim attitude towards monasticism, would be as follows: even if it is an authentic document, the letter proves nothing other than the fact that, since monks are generally harmless, they should be left in peace. In other words, they should be protected, yes, but only on account of a legal principle, and despite the dogmatic errors on which their way of life is founded.

My contention, on the contrary, is that the legal principle of protection is itself the expression of the fundamental unity of the Abrahamic faiths, an inward unity of spirit which is directly connected to 'that which is finest', that which is *ahsan,* and which takes precedence over the differences between the faiths on the level of external forms. This position, we believe, helps us to resolve, in a fruitful and reflective manner, the paradox generated by the Charter.

The paradox is this: monasticism is clearly referred to in the Qur'an as an 'innovation'; and yet the Prophet's words— not to mention the tradition of protection characterizing Muslim relations with monks throughout history— imply a recognition of the validity of the monastic ideal. Furthermore, it is in the monastic Way that one finds Christianity at its most exalted and concentrated— the monks raise to its highest pitch of intensity all that makes Christianity what it is, including the very dogmas criticized in the Qur'an.

The paradox is sharpened further when we consider the principle, no monasticism in Islam' (*la rahbaniyya fi'l-Islam*), and the Sunnah of the Prophet in which marriage is so highly stressed, being referred to in fact as 'half of the religion'. The ideal of *tawhid,* of integrating oneness, dictates that the whole of life— not just religious devotion— is to be placed at the service of God. Contemplation and action are seen as complementary, not contradictory, for the Muslim; isolating oneself from the world for the sake of contemplation is, from this point of view, unfaithful to the integral human vocation.

The contrast between the Muslim and the monastic ideal is clear. But this contrast on the surface should not blind us to certain underlying, and largely unsuspected, affinities between the two ideals. One can argue:

1) that these affinities help to account for the extraordinary respect and solicitude manifested to the monks by the Prophet of Islam;
2) that these affinities are most markedly expressed in one key dimension of the Prophet's Sunnah, on the one hand, and the mystical fruits of the monastic path on the other;
3) that, probed with sufficient depth, these affinities reveal the power of sincere devotion to transcend the plane of dogmatic differences; and finally
4) that the realities revealed through devotion, contemplation, and pure prayer, not only relativise dogmatic differences as between different faiths but also, and with all the more reason, they relativise differences of doctrine and practices within one and the same faith: to put it bluntly, if the Prophet could go so far in respecting and protecting the monks of Christendom, is it not absurd that we, as Muslims sharing the same faith, seem unable to tolerate and respect each other's differences? The lesson for intra-faith dialogue is clear: we ought to be able to focus upon what is most excellent' in the position, the beliefs, the attitudes and the cultures of the internal Other, our fellow Muslims.

I strongly believe that one of the best ways of increasing tolerance of diversity within Islam is to deepen our understanding, and our practice, of the spiritual substance of the faith; careful consideration of the affinities between the Sunnah of the Prophet and the monastic ideal helps us to orient our attention to this spirit that transcends the plane of dogma, and which also gives inner life to the dogmas that can only partially express the Real.

What, then, are these affinities? First, let us hear what the Qur'an says about the monks: *You will find the nearest of them* [the People of the Book] *in love to those who believe to be those who say: Verily, we are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and they are not proud.*[71]

Humility is given as a key characteristic of the monks here, this accounting

[71] Surat al-Ma'ida, V: 82

for one of the reasons why the Christians will be the 'nearest' of the People of the Book to the Muslims. However, we need to probe the deeper aspects of this nearness, for it goes beyond mere friendship or sentiment. The following verse, from the Sura Al 'Imran, leads us to these deeper aspects:

> *They are not all alike. Among the People of Book is an upright community, who recite the verses of God in the watches of the night, and who prostrate [to Him] ; they believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and hasten unto good works; they are among the righteous.* (Surat Al 'Imran, III: 13)

One can justifiably regard the monks and nuns as being among those referred to in this verse. Now the very intensity of their devotion, entailing long night vigils, mirrors one crucial aspect of the Prophetic Sunnah, so little stressed in our days. We know that the Prophet and his close companions also spent long periods of the night in prayer, as the following verse, from the Surat al-Muzzammil tells us:

> *Truly your Lord knows that you stand in prayer close to two-thirds of the night, and half of it, and a third of it— you and a group (*taifa*) of those with you...* (LXXIII: *20)*

One thus sees something of the monastic way very much present in the Sunnah of the Prophet. We also know from strongly authenticated hadiths, that the Prophet would spend hours at a stretch reciting such long Surahs as the Surat al-Baqara and the Surat Al 'Imran, bowing and prostrating frequently, making supplications in accordance with the verses recited.[72] One might also mention here the Prophet's *zuhd,* his abstemiousness, his regular fasts apart from Ramadan, and the fact that, when he did eat, he never filled his stomach with food. Such details of the Prophet's life help us to see something of the discipline that we associate with the monastic way. However, what distinguishes the Prophetic norm is that this intense contemplative discipline was accomplished in the very midst of an active marital, social, and political life.

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[72] See Qazi 'Iyad's *Muhammad, Messenger of God (al-Shifa),* Tr. Aisha Bewley, (Inverness: Madinah Press, 1991), pp. 74-75

In this light we can better appreciate the principle of 'no monasticism in Islam': in the words of Frithjof Schuon, "it really means not that contemplatives must not withdraw from the world, but that the world must not be withdrawn from contemplatives"[73]— in other words, the world must not be deprived of the graces that flow through the presence of contemplatives within it. For the aim of Islam is to penetrate the whole of life with spirituality, not that spirituality is to be excluded from everyday life.

We can take another step closer to understanding the 'nearness' of the Christian monastic way to the Muslim contemplative ideal by looking carefully at another central aspect of the Sunnah: the remembrance of God, *dhikru'Llah*.

One must always remember, in any discussion of *dhikr,* that it means both a principle of awareness, of recollectedness, of consciousness of God, and also the means to achieve that awareness, namely the invocation of the Name or Names of God, the meditative practice *par excellence* of the contemplative tradition of Islam. If prayer constitutes the core of religious practice, the *dhikru'Llah* is, as the Qur'an puts it very simply, *akbar,* that is, *greater* or *greatest:*[74] *Truly prayer keeps* [one] *away from lewdness and iniquity, and the remembrance of God is greater.* (Surat al-'Ankabut, XXIX: 45)[75]

Numerous sayings of the Prophet attest to the pre-eminence of the *dhikr*. For example, it is related that the Prophet asked his companions: 'Shall I not tell you about the best and purest of your works for your Lord, and the most exalted of them in your ranks, and the work that is better for you than giving silver and gold, and better for you than encountering your enemy, with you striking their necks and them striking your necks?' Thereupon the people addressed by him said: 'What is that; O Emissary of God?' He said, The

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[73] This is from the remarkable essay by Schuon, "The Universality of Monasticism and its Relevance in the Modern World", in his *Light on the Ancient Worlds* (London: Perennial Books, 1965; reprint, Suhail Academy 2004), p. 122.

[74] The Arabic comparative is at the same time the superlative, so the word *akbar* can be translated in either way.

[75] All translations from the Qur'an are based on those of Pickthall and Arberry.

perpetual invocation of God— exalted and glorious *(dhikru 'Llah 'azza wa jalla daiman).*[76]

And again: upon being asked 'Which act is most meritorious?' the Prophet replied: '[It is] that you die while your tongue is moistened with the *dhikru'Llah...'*[77] Likewise, the fourth Caliph Sayyidina 'Ali affirms: 'Perpetuate the *dhikr, for* truly it illumines the heart, and it is the most excellent form of worship *(huwa afzal al-'ibada).*[78]

There are many verses of the Qur'an that should be carefully noted in connection with the *dhikr.* Let us restrict ourselves, however, to the following.

> *Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God; is it not in the remembrance of God that hearts are at peace?* (Surat al-Ra'd, XIII: 28) *Those are true believers whose hearts quake with awe when God is invoked* (Surat al-Anfal, VIII: 2) *And invoke the Name of your Lord morning and evening.* (Surat al-Insan, LXXVI: 25) *And invoke the Name of your Lord, devoting yourself to it with utter devotion.* (Surat al-Muzzammil, LXXIII: 8) *O ye who believe! Invoke God with much invocation.* (al-Ahzab, XXXIII: 42) *Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation between night and day are signs for those of substance, those who remember God standing, sitting, and reclining on their sides and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth...* (Al 'Imran, III: 190-191) *And invoke your Lord within yourself, in humility and awe, and beneath your breath, in the morning and in the night.* (al-A'raf, VII: 205)

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[76] Cited in *Al-Ghazali--Invocations and Supplications,* (Book IX of The Revival of the Religious Sciences) Trans. K. Nakamura (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1990), p. 8 (we have slightly modified the translation of the last sentence of the hadith.) This hadith is found in the collection of Ibn Maja *(Sunan,* Adab, 53) and in that of Ibn Hanbal *(Musnad,* VI. 447). See the Arabic text for this and several other hadith of similar import in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 391-2.

[77] Ibid. p. 7. The hadith is given in Tabarani's *al-Mu'jam al-kabir, XX.* 107. *Ghurar al-Hikam wa durar al-kalim* (Qom: Imam-e 'Asr, 2001) p.177, no.2537

[78] *Ghurar al-Hikam wa durar al-kalim* (Qom: Imam-e 'Asr, 2001) p. 177, no. 2537.

The *dhikr is* presented here as the quintessence of all religious activity, or as the spiritual act *par excellence.* For the universality of its modes— standing, sitting, reclining, 'in yourself' 'with humility', 'with awe', 'in secret', 'under one's breath', according to the verses cited above— transcend the formal rules pertaining to the fixed canonical prayers, which involve particular words, movements, conditions, and times: the *dhikr,* by contrast is described as something to be performed at all times, in all places, in all postures; it is thus to be woven into the texture of everyday life, rather than super-imposed upon life as an extraneous, formalistic practice.

One of the names of the Prophet is indeed *dhikru'Llah,* (remembrance of God) and the whole of his life, in all its manifold diversity can be summed up in this phrase: never for a moment was he distracted from God, he was always immersed in consciousness of reality. Now, turning to the monks, we will find that such a perspective on prayer resonates deeply with the chief, distinguishing feature of the monastic contemplative path, particularly as regards the Eastern Orthodox Church, to which the monks of St Catherine's have always belonged. The 'prayer of the Heart', the 'Jesus Prayer', which is the continuous repetition of a formula containing the Name of Jesus— was and still is the essence of what is known as the Hesychastic Way, from *hesychia,* meaning 'silence and stillness'. This refers to a state of receptivity to nothing but the divine Presence. Listen to this description of the remembrance of God given by one of the earliest masters of Hesychasm, St. Diadochos of Photiki, who lived in the fifth century:

"Those who desire to free themselves from their corruption ought to pray not merely from time to time, but at all times…… a man who merely practices the remembrance of God from time to time loses through lack of continuity what he hopes to gain through his prayer. It is a mark of one who truly loves holiness that he continuously burns up what is worldly in his heart through practising the remembrance of God, so that, little by little, evil is consumed in the fire of this remembrance..."[79]

Not only can this passage be read as a commentary on the Qur'anic words, *and the remembrance of God is greater,* but also on the verse which tells us

[79] *The Philokalia,* vol. 1

about men who are not distracted by trade and business from the remembrance of God.[80]

At this point we can anticipate the following objection: the God which is believed in, remembered and invoked by the Christian contemplatives is not identical to Allah, for they believe in a Trinitarian God. Now there are two responses we can make. The first is to cite the verse of the Qur'an which tells the Muslims to say to the People of the Book explicitly: *Our God and your God is one, and unto Him we surrender.*[81]

Other theological arguments could be made here, but let us move to the second response, which leads us to a more profound understanding of what this verse can mean in metaphysical terms. This involves studying carefully the doctrinal framework within which the remembrance of God was and is accomplished by the Christian monks.

To be as brief as possible, this is described as mystical theology, or as apophatic, that is, negative, theology, associated chiefly with the towering figure of St Dionysius the Areopagite.[82] This figure, whose life is shrouded in mystery, probably lived in the fifth century. He adopted the persona of St Paul's Athenian convert mentioned in Acts, 17: 34; and wrote under this pseudonym treatises that remain foundational for Christian mysticism.

So what is the nature of this 'God' in whom the Christian mystical theologians believe? According to Dionysius, and all the great authorities in the Hesychastic tradition, God is absolutely indescribable. He is the inscrutable One, writes Dionysius, 'out of reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this unity unifying every unity.' This sounds very much like *tawhid,* does it not?

Dionysius continues: When...we give the name of "God" to that

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[80] Surat al-Nur, XXIV: 36-37.

[81] Surat al-'Ankabut, XXIX:.46

[82] The scholar Bernard McGinn describes him as the fountainhead of mystical speculative systems for at least one thousand years.' *The Foundations of Mysticism* (London: SCM Press, 1992), vol. 1, p. 158.

transcendent hiddenness, when we call it "life" or "being" or "light" or "Word", what our minds lay hold of is nothing other than certain activities apparent to us..."[83] Does this not remind us of the Qur'anic refrain: *glorified be God above what they describe?*

Going forward in time, but coming closer in space to St. Catherine's, listen to St Gregory of Sinai, of the 14th century: "stillness means the shedding of all thoughts for a time, even those which are Divine and engendered by the Spirit ..."[84]

The state of Hesychia, then, is receptive only to That which transcends all thoughts, and therefore all dogmas— it is an opening to the divine Reality as it is in itself, not such as it is defined by dogmatic thought. It is in this contemplation of the supreme Reality— which is absolutely One— that the Christian theological tenet of the oneness of God finds its most compelling consummation. St. Gregory of Palamas, another central figure in the tradition of Hesychasm, puts this oneness of God in the following terms: [85]

> 'We worship one true and perfect God in three true and perfect Persons— not a threefold God— far from it— but a simple God.'[86] We should remember here that simple means non-compound, absolutely itself with no admixture or multiplicity.

Again, let us anticipate the obvious objection: this conception of the oneness of God is compromised by the mention of three Persons. My response is this: what is more important for us, as Muslims, when we evaluate this Christian conception of God— is it the oneness, the ultimate

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83 'Cited by Vincent Rossi, 'Presence, Participation, Performance: The Remembrance of God in the Early Hesychast Fathers', in ed. James S. Cutsinger, *Paths to the Heart--Sufism and the Christian East,* Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2002, pp. 78-79. Cf. Imam Baqir.

84 Cited by James Cutsinger, 'Hesychia: An Orthodox opening to Esoteric Ecumenism', in *Paths to the Heart,* p. 236

85 As Jeremy Henzell-Thomas notes: *simple* denotes "same-fold" - that is, not multifarious, exactly what is denoted by the original meaning of "identity". It goes back ultimately to a compound formed from prehistoric Indo-European **sm-, *sem-,* *som-'same' (source also of English *same, similar, single,* etc) and **pl-* 'fold'. This passed into Latin as *simplus,* "single".

86 Cited by Peter Samsel, 'A Unity with Distinctions: Parallels in the Thought of St Gregory Palamas and Ibn Arabi', in *Paths to the Heart,* p. 195.

Reality that transcends all dogmas, or is it the fact that, on the level of dogma, a Trinitarian conception comes into the picture? We contend that we would be true both to the Qur'an and the Sunnah if we focus on what is *ahsan,* finest, most excellent, in the Christian conception of the Real, and thus allow their own stress on the transcendent oneness of God to take priority, for us, over the Trinitarian aspect of their belief.

Furthermore, our ability to focus on this transcendent aspect of their belief will be deepened in the very measure that we are sensitive to the spiritual substance of our own faith; and it will be strengthened also by our awareness of the fact that the reality of God transcends all dogmas, our own included; and this position will be made more existential and less theoretical insofar as we intensify our commitment to that reality through the actual practice of prayer, devotion and contemplation.

This point of view helps us to resolve the paradox of the Qur'anic position on the People of the Book: on the one hand, many verses criticize their dogmatic errors; and on the other, there are clear verses indicating that they are nonetheless saved on account of their faith and virtue. There is also an incident in the Prophet's life which helps us to resolve this paradox; it is an eloquent expression of the principle we have been trying to stress: sincere devotion to the supreme Reality transcends the plane of dogmatic differences.

A delegation of Christians came from Najran in Yemen to engage the Prophet in theological debate, largely over the nature of Christ. What matters from our point of view is not so much the fact that the debate was cut short by the Prophet's challenge to engage in a *mubahala,* a curse on those who were wrong— a challenge the Christians did not take up; nor does its spiritual significance reside only in the fact that the Prophet offered the Christians protection, in return for tribute. For me, the deepest significance of this episode lies in the fact that, when the Bishop wished to perform the liturgy for the delegation, the Prophet allowed him to do so in his own mosque.

Now the Prophet was fully aware of what the liturgy entailed, in its essentials, and that the formulae used would of course centre on Christ as the

Son of God. The Bishop would thus be reciting the very words that are so severely censured in the Qur'an; and yet the Prophet allowed him to do so in his own sacred place of worship. Was this just a question of good *adab* on the Prophet's part? Or can we see this act of spiritual etiquette arising, rather, out of the Prophet's recognition of the principle we are stressing here: just as the divine reality transcends all dogma, likewise, sincere devotion to that reality transcends the dogmatic framework within which it is accomplished.

Let us return to the words of the Qur'an cited by the Prophet in the Charter: *Discourse not with them except in that which is finest.* We have seen in the Prophet's actions towards the monks, in particular, a clear expression of what this finest' element is: all that is most noble, most elevated, most sincere. This mode of discourse does not mean a refusal to differ: it means to differ with dignity and respect. It means a refusal to allow any differences to eclipse or undermine what is most noble in the neighbour, in the "Other"; what is most essential in his or her belief. It means a refusal to allow one's attitude to the "Other"— whether within or outside one's religion— to be determined by extrinsic and relative factors. It means, on the contrary, an affirmation of all that is best in the "Other", and to make this the basis of one's fundamental disposition towards the "Other".

In this way, one induces the "Other" to likewise see what is best in one's own position: a reciprocal recognition, a mutual respect can thus be envisaged and cultivated between two or more partners in dialogue.

This reciprocal recognition is finely expressed in the relationship between the monks and the Prophet, and it is enshrined in symbolic as well as literal terms, For we have not only the covenant of St. Catherine's, and other letters of recognition and protection granted by the Prophet, but also the following remarkable facts of sacred history, centred on the monks associated with the city of Bostra in Syria who recognised the Prophet prior to the onset of his mission.

First we have the monk Bahira, who invited the Meccan traders passing through Bostra to a feast, and recognised the signs of the awaited prophet in

the young Muhammad who was with his uncle, Abu Talib.[87] These signs, described in prophecies handed down from generation to generation, were most likely the basis on which, decades later, the monk Nestor, also in Bostra— perhaps in the very same cell of Bahira— told Maysara that he was travelling with the long-awaited Prophet.[88] And finally, again in Bostra, we hear of an unnamed monk telling Talha that the Prophet had come, and named him.[89] The mystery of these coincidences is deepened when we remember that Amina, the Prophet's mother, claimed that she was aware of a light within her when she was pregnant, a light which shone with such intensity that she claimed she could see the castles of Bostra.[90]

Can we see here a luminous anticipation of the mutual recognition between the Prophet and the monks— each recognising the light of God in the other? This provides us with a wonderful theme for meditation, with which we can draw these remarks to a close. The light of the Prophet shines from the womb, the *rahim*. This takes us directly to *rahma* (mercy), the compassion proper to true wisdom: *We sent you not,* God says to the Prophet, *except as a rahma* (mercy) *to all creation* (Surat al-Anbiya', XXI: 107). This compassionate wisdom does not negate but affirm, not abrogate but illuminate, the truth and sanctity present in all religions, which are all revelations of one and the same God. It is thus that the Prophet is described, together with the believers, as believing in "God, His Angels, His Books and His Messengers": *la nufarriqu bayna ahadin min rusulihi— We make no distinction between any of His Messengers.*[91] In the luminous and compassionate wisdom of the Prophet, then, there is both illumination and illimitation or Non-Delimitation: bounded by no dogmatic restrictions, it brings truth to light wherever it is to be found. It is thus 'light upon light', *nurun 'ala nur*.

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[87] *Muhammad—His Life Based on the Earliest Sources,* M. Lings, Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1996, reprint, Suhail Academy, 2004, p. 29.
[88] Ibid. p. 34.
[89] Ibid. p.47.
[90] Ibid. p.21.
[91] Surat al-Baqarah, II: 285.

MODERN INDIAN MUSLIMS AND IQBAL

Dr. Javid Iqbal

The book *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* or the 'Madras Lectures' of Allama Iqbal, has been translated into Urdu under the title *Tashkeel-e-Jadid-e Ilahiyat-e Islamia*. In the light of this work I have chosen to speak on the topic: "Iqbal and the Concept of the Islamic State in Modern Times." But before opening the discussion, it is necessary to throw some light on these lectures of Iqbal.

This book has remained the least noticed work of Iqbal, although it deserves a lot more attention. The main reason for this neglect is that these lectures were addressed to, and later published for, the Muslims of the new generation. Iqbal was aware that the new generation of Muslims could not remain aloof from the values of modern western culture. It was therefore necessary for them to remain Muslim and at the same time to become modern. Since this book discussed modernity in Islam, some of the Ulema were quite annoyed with it. For this very reason publication of Urdu translation was delayed. It was feared that the translation could provoke the wrath of the Ulema and they might consider it a manifesto of a new religion like Akbar's *Din-e Ilahi* or a distortion of religion under the pretext of reinterpretation. Many objections were raised. For instance, the late Allama Syed Sulaiman Nadvi was reported to have said that it would have been better if he had published this book. Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, who reported these words, commented in these words:

> I do not consider Iqbal an innocent and pious person or a religious guide or an Imam Mujtahid, nor do I cross the limits, as his staunch supporters do, while acknowledging and praising his works. I consider that Hakeem Sana'i, 'Attar and Rumi were far ahead of him in respecting and following the Shari'ah, uniformity in thought and deed, and harmony between precept and practice. Iqbal presented several interpretations of Islamic faith and philosophy, agreement with which seems very difficult. I am also not convinced, like some enthusiastic young men, that no one had a better understanding of Islam than him and that none could surpass him in the

knowledge of Islamic sciences and historical facts. On the contrary, the truth is that all his life he kept on benefiting from his distinguished contemporaries. There are some drawbacks in his unique personality which do not quite match with the sweep of his knowledge and the greatness of his message. Unfortunately he could not find an opportunity to get rid of them. There are many thoughts and views expressed in his Modern Lectures, the interpretation of which conflicts with the collective convictions of the Sunnis.... It would have been better if these Lectures had not been published.

The fact that emerges is that because of their conservatism the Ulema of the subcontinent are not yet ready to accept the change that has taken place in modern life. Even today they believe that the Madras Lectures are a great danger to the future of Islam. If the society which Iqbal dreamt of in these Lectures had come into existence, then the face of Islam, particularly in regard to worldly affairs (*Mu'aamalaat*), with which we are familiar, would have not remained unchanged. This is the reason why the Ulema strongly opposed this book of Iqbal. A few years ago a seminar was held in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) where some one asserted that his book contained nothing except heresies, and that the Muslims must not read it.

However, this is an extremely important book. Some eminent Muslim scholars whom I had the opportunity to meet in Istanbul, Damascus and Cairo feel that a book like this has not been written in the Islamic world for the past three hundred years, and that the importance of this book is increasing in the world of Islam with each passing day.

The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam has been translated into Urdu as *Fikr-e Islami ki Tashkeel-e Jadid*. This translation, in my opinion, is appropriate because what is meant by 'Reconstruction' is the process of 'correcting' or 'reforming'. You may call it either 'Modern Reconstruction' or 'Reformation'. But it is not the reconstruction of Islam or the Islamic faith, as was the movement of Martin Luther in Christianity. Martin Luther's movement is called the Reformation. What he meant by Reformation was a new interpretation of Christianity, which led to the establishment of a new school of thought or rather a new religion. But here the aim is not reconstruction of Islam but the reconstruction of the religious thought of

Islam. Now the question arises as to when is such reconstruction or reformation required? Obviously when decadence takes place, a revival or renaissance becomes essential; otherwise if the process of deterioration is allowed to continue nations and communities cease to exist. This is the era of Muslim cultural and ideological revival, and the book was written during this period, because Iqbal belonged to that period of the history of the subcontinent when the process of reformation had commenced even before his birth. Shah Waliullah, Syed Ahmed Shaheed, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Shibli Nomani were personalities who were senior to Iqbal, and had already started the process of the reconstruction of Islamic thought. Jamaluddin Afghani was also one of them. In 1882, when Afghani took refuge in Hyderabad Deccan, Iqbal was only twelve years old. So one can imagine that the work of reconstruction had started even before Iqbal was born. Thus, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Iqbal tried to study and apprise the Muslim community, and that too very courageously, as to what were the causes of decay in their society. It is very interesting to note that after one thousand years of the death of Imam Ghazali, Iqbal for the first time in the modern history of Islam disclosed that there were three negative forces against which Jihad should be waged, and that only through the extermination of these forces could the new Muslim Society be brought into being. According to Iqbal, these three negative forces are: Autocratic Monarchy, ignorant Mullaism (Islamic priesthood) and decadent Sufism. In this context he addresses the Muslims of India and says: *Ay Kushta-e Sultani-o Mullai-o Piri* (You are nothing but a crushed compound of autocratic Monarchy, ignorant Priesthood, and False Spiritual Guidance.

These are the three disintegrating forces which led to the decadence of Muslim society. This means that Iqbal felt the necessity for reforming these forces so that they could yield positive results for the reconstruction. For example, he wanted to bring about changes in the teaching of Islamic theology, and it was his desire to bring a new *Ilm-ul Kalaam* (Scholastic religious thought) into existence, because at the present time man had made tremendous progress in the empirical sciences, and in the light of this advancement in human knowledge, a new scholastic philosophy was needed. Without a new approach in theology, it was not possible to strengthen the faith of the new generation of Muslims. Similarly, he wished for a revolution in the sphere of Sufism. Consequently, when he wrote the Introduction to

the publication of his lectures, he specifically mentioned the need of this revolution. His third important point was to do away with autocratic monarchy in Islam and to proceed towards democracy, which according to him was to return to the original purity of Islam. After providing this background, I would like to bring to your notice that aspect of Iqbal's Philosophy which is known as *Khudi* (Self). Whether he talks in terms of the individual self or the collective self, the aim of Iqbal was that, through the development of the individual and the collective ego, a new Muslim society should be brought into being. In this respect his thought is founded on three basic concepts. These are: First, his concept of Muslim nationhood— i.e., the nationality of Muslims is to be based not on community, colour, race, language or territory but on a common spiritual aspiration. Second, Islam cannot be conceived without *Shawkah* (Power). In other words, according to Iqbal, the new Muslim society cannot be subjugated. It has to be free, and in a dominant position. Third, if 'Power' is the ultimate aim, then it is necessary to find a manifestation for it— and this manifestation is the realisation of a state for the new Muslim society. His writing and discourses prior to the famous Allahabad Address reveal that he always had these three things in mind— the concept of Muslim nationality, the concept of Islam with 'Power' translation, in my opinion, is appropriate because what is meant by 'Reconstruction' is the process of 'correcting' or 'reforming'. You may call it either 'Modern Reconstruction' or 'Reformation'. But it is not the reconstruction of Islam or the Islamic faith, as was the movement of Martin Luther in Christianity. Martin Luther's movement is called the Reformation. What he meant by Reformation was a new interpretation of Christianity, which led to the establishment of a new school of thought or rather a new religion. But here the aim is not reconstruction of Islam but the reconstruction of the religious thought of Islam. Now the question arises as to when is such reconstruction or reformation required? Obviously when decay takes place, a revival or renaissance becomes essential; otherwise if the process of deterioration is allowed to continue nations and communities cease to exist. This is the era of Muslim cultural and ideological revival, and the book was written during this period, because Iqbal belonged to that period of the history of the subcontinent when the process of reformation had commenced even before his birth. Shah Waliullah, Syed Ahmed Shaheed, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Shibli Nomani were personalities who were senior to Iqbal, and had already started the process of

the reconstruction of Islamic thought. Jamaluddin Afghani was also one of them. In 1882, when Afghani took shelter in Hyderabad Deccan, Iqbal was only twelve years old. So one can imagine that the work of reconstruction had started even before Iqbal was born. Thus, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Iqbal tried to study and apprise the Muslim community, and that too very courageously, as to what were the causes of decay in their society. It is very interesting to note that after one thousand years of the death of Imam Ghazali, Iqbal for the first time in the modern history of Islam disclosed that there were three negative forces against which Jihad should be waged, and that only through the extermination of these forces could the new Muslim Society be brought into being. According to Iqbal, these three negative forces are: Autocratic language or territory but on a common spiritual aspiration. Second, Islam cannot be conceived without *Shawkah* (Power). In other words, according to Iqbal, the new Muslim society cannot be subjugated. It has to be free, and in a dominant position. Third, if 'Power' is the ultimate aim, then it is necessary to find a manifestation for it— and this manifestation is the realisation of a state for the new Muslim society. His writing and discourses prior to the famous Allahabad Address reveal that he always had these three things in mind— the concept of Muslim nationality, the concept of Islam with 'Power' and the need for the creation of a Muslim State which he considered as the "territorial specification of Islam". He lays emphasis on the state because 'power' cannot be imagined in the absence of a state. A minority could never wield 'power'. This was the reason why the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) left his ancestral home, Mecca and founded a state in Medinah.

In this context, let us consider the discussion which took place between Iqbal and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani. Maulana Madani's point of view was that of an Indian nationalist. On the other hand, Iqbal's view was that of a Muslim nationalist. Maulana held that as a nation Muslims were Indians, but as a community (Ummah/ Millah) they were Muslim. Whereas for Iqbal nation and community were one and the same thing. There was no difference between the two. It is surprising to note that most of the Ulema who opposed the Pakistan movement and also rejected Iqbal's thesis, were prepared to accept the Muslims as part of the Indian nation in the secular set-up of India but were not prepared to accept Iqbal's concept of the creation of a new Muslim society in a politically free modern Islamic state of

Pakistan. In other words, these Ulema were so attached to the conventional approach to Islam that they were willing to live under Indian secularism rather than agree to accept *ijtihad* or a new approach. In this connection I have always used three terms. What Iqbal called the Mullah's approach, I call the conventional or traditional approach to Islam. What Iqbal called *Piri-muridi*, I call populist approach to Islam; and those who were the founding fathers of Pakistan, including Iqbal, their approach to Islam, according to me, was reformist. The social struggle being waged in all Muslim societies today is between these three groups. The masses who represent 'Populist' Islam are passive in this struggle, but the conventionalists and reformists are fighting the battle as backward-looking-romantics and forward looking realists. Generally speaking, the masses of Islam can neither read the Qur'an nor understand it. It is difficult to say whether they even know their prayer. Therefore, a large majority of them depend on their spiritual guides, pirs and saints who they believe are able to intercede between them and God.

Because of ignorance, this belief holds firm ground in their minds. May be some time in the future, when education spreads enlightenment, the present shape of the common man's Islam will change. But until then this situation must be considered to prevail to the advantage of the politician and the protagonist of conventional Islam. Moreover, the group of educated and enlightened Muslims who subscribe to reformist Islam is too small, and some time is required for them to develop into a class which could command a position of influence and power.

What are the constituent elements of Muslim society according to Iqbal? A serious consideration would reveal that Muslims are still far away from the reformist approach to Islam. Although a section of the Muslims of the subcontinent have obtained Pakistan, it would take a long time to make it a modern Islamic state. We have talked about the difference between the approaches of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Iqbal, and have also taken note of the views of Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi about Iqbal. Now I venture to present another interesting extract on Iqbal. This is form

Maulana Najmuddin who is one of the disciples of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani. He states:[92]

> We consider it a religious crime to grant the late Dr. Iqbal the status of more than that of a poet and a philosopher, as we have studied his writings carefully. It is no exaggeration to say that although hundreds and thousands of his verses are useful, there are many which openly strike at Islam and Islamic philosophy.

He further adds:

> The work of law-making in Pakistan can certainly be undertaken in the light of Iqbal's thought because the Islam on the basis of which Pakistan has been founded is in fact another name for Iqbal's philosophy.

It is, therefore, evident that a group of Ulema have always said that Pakistan was created in the name of a specific kind of Islam which they consider as another name for Iqbal's philosophy.

Now let us examine the other dimension of the problem: What kind of sick society did Iqbal confront? He began formulating his thoughts in 1904. I would like to draw your attention towards his first article namely, "Qaumi Zindagi" (National life). It was written in 1904 and was published in *Makhzan*. Before presenting a quotation from this article, I would like to re-emphasise that Iqbal was very much influenced by the factor of change. I shall try to establish through this quotation that according to him it was this strange factor of change that distinguished the present from the past. Commenting upon the progress made by the other nations, Iqbal describes Muslim societies thus (and I would urge you to tell me whether or not today any change has been accomplished):

> I am sorry to say that, seen from this angle, the condition of the Muslims appears to be most deplorable. This unfortunate community has lost its political power, lost its craftsmanship, lost its commerce and trade, and

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[92] Najmuddin Islahi, *Maktubaat-e Sheikh-ul Islam*, Lahore 1944, Third Volume p.141.

now, unconcerned with the disease of poverty, it is leaning on the useless staff of vain hope. Let alone other things, until now their religious differences have not been resolved. Every other day a new sect pops up, proclaiming itself as the sole heir of paradise, denouncing the rest of the human species as the fuel for hell. In short, this form of sectarianism has shattered the unity of the best of the communities in such a way that it is impossible to reunite it as a single community... The condition of our Maulvis (Preachers) is such that if two of them happen to be present in the same town, they would exchange messages to meet and hold a discussion on the life of Jesus Christ or the revelation and cancellation of the Quranic verses. And if the discussion commences, as it often does, it leads to the exchange of such abuses that one has to seek refuge in God. The vastness of knowledge, tolerance and understanding which were the characteristics of the old savants of Islam exist not even in name...There is however, a list of Muslim *Kafirs* (non-believers) which goes on increasing as more names are being added to it with the vicious hand of our preachers. The story of the decadent Muslim affluent class is different. By the Grace of God, he already has four daughters and two sons and yet the gentleman is in search of a third wife, and keeps on secretly sending word here and there, taking every care that the existing two wives should not come to know of it. Sometimes, if he gets a respite from domestic quarrels, he ventures to have a little fun with a prostitute in the street...to say nothing of the Muslim masses— some would spend their life's earnings on the ritual of a child's circumcision; another would withdraw his pampered child from school because of the fear of the teacher; yet another one would spend his day's earnings in one evening and console himself by saying that God will take care of tomorrow. Elsewhere, a fortune is being wasted on litigation over a petty matter, while properties are being destroyed in property-related quarrels... The portrait of Muslim culture briefly is that girls are uneducated, boys are ignorant and unemployed. They are afraid of industry and commerce, and are ashamed of learning crafts. Divorce litigation is on the increase every day, and incidents of crime are going up. This is a very desperate situation and there seems to be no way out except that the entire community should make a endeavour united to set their minds and hearts in the direction of reform. No great task in this world can be completed without great effort.

> Even God does not change the condition of any community unless that community itself makes an effort for its betterment.

This is a very important quotation. It will give you some idea of the direction in which Iqbal's thought was moving since 1904. He was realising that the reformation of Muslim culture was necessary and this would be possible only if Islamic laws, were reinterpreted. Iqbal kept writing time and again on these topics. The extracts from his writings that I am reproducing were published during different periods, especially between 1904 and 1938. Let us examine the following quotation; but before I reproduce it I want to submit that an important aspect of Iqbal's thought is that he genuinely believed that the revival of Islam is not possible merely by the revival of religion unless it is accompanied by the revival of Muslim culture. I will explain what Iqbal meant by 'culture'. Let us first consider the quotation:

> Among the Muslims, the question of reforming their culture is in fact a religious question, because Muslim culture actually is the practical form of the religion of Islam. There is no aspect of our cultural life which can be detached from our religion. It is not my intention to discuss this important matter from the religious standpoint. Nevertheless, I will not hesitate to point out that due to the great change in the condition of our lives, certain new cultural necessities have emerged, that the principles devised by our jurists (*Fuqaha*) the collection of which is generally known as Islamic Shari'ah, needs revision. It is not my contention that there is some inherent flaw in the basic principles of our religion due to which it is not possible for us to resolve our contemporary cultural problems. On the contrary, my contention is that most of the interpretations of the Holy Qur'an and Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet) advanced by our jurists from time to time are such as were relevant and suitable for specific periods of time, but do not conform to the modern needs and requirements of the Muslims...Taking into consideration the modern needs and requirements of the Muslim community, we need not only to follow a new theological approach (*Ilm-ul Kalaam*) in support of the principles of religion, but need also a great jurist who could reinterpret Islamic law, and grant such breadth to the rules, through his logic and implication, that they would fulfil all the possible demands and requirements of the present day Muslims. So far as I know, to date no

such eminent jurist has been born in the Muslim world. If we are to consider the importance of this problem, it appears that more than one mind and a period of at least one century is required to complete this task.

In 1905, a revolution took place against the Shah of Iran. Iqbal carefully watched this period of Iranian history generally known as *Daur-e Istabdad-e Saghir* (The Era of Minor Tyranny). Mohammed Raza, who later became Raza Shah Pehlavi, was the leader of this revolution. In the early stages, he wanted to become the president of Iran following the Turkish example as he tried to convert Iran into a modern democratic state. But the Shi'a Ulema opposed this conversion and advised him to adopt the title of Shah (King). However, they retained the power of interpreting Islamic law as the successors of the Occult Imam (*Imam-e Gha'ib*). These moves made Iqbal arrive at the conclusion that gradually Iran was also heading towards elections, although according to the Shi'a theory of the Islamic state there exists a separation between the temporal power headed by the Shah and the spiritual (juridical) power assumed by the Shi'a Ulema Council.

The 'method' referred to here by Iqbal requires some attention. What he meant is that a Muslim child should be identified as a Muslim and also as a modern individual. The 'method' which he mentions repeatedly is that, unlike the old system of education, the Islamic Dar-ul Uloom (study centre) must constitute an integral part of a modern university. There should be the subjects in which our preachers and missionaries should be well-versed. Iqbal insists upon their acquiring command over national literature, economics and sociology. Thus it is evident that he wanted to see the Muslims remaining Muslims and at the same time accepting modernity. Generally speaking, the dreams of Iqbal have not been realised so far. I would add here that when Iqbal went to Madras to deliver these Lectures, his host too subscribed to the same views. Seth Jamal Mohammed used to spend a large amount of money every year on such lectures. Before Iqbal, he had invited Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, who delivered lectures on Islam. Iqbal was the third in the series who was asked to deliver his lectures. Seth Jamal Mohammed wanted to create an environment wherein Muslims could retain a strong faith and at the same time not hesitate to become modern.

The writings of Iqbal indicate that according to him the political order recommended by the Qur'an was based on elections, and the legal order was based on the interpretations of Islamic law advanced by the judges. The third important point is that he uses the expression 'Muslim Commonwealth' for the Islamic state.

Now we may turn to the question as to what Iqbal meant by the revival of Islamic culture? Why was it necessary and urgent? Iqbal felt that Muslim society, of which he was a member, was a sick society. He desired to bring about the creation of a new society and that is why he used to claim that his message or address was not meant for the intellectually disabled and the old because such people are incapable of changing. He called himself the 'poet of tomorrow'. For this reason he was more interested in, and directed his message to, the Muslim youth, who could create the new Muslim society of his dreams. In this context, carrying the discussion further, I would like to present another extract from his writings, particularly because whenever I have tried to express my views respecting Iqbal's thought, it has met with strong opposition from the conservative Ulema who now claim to own Iqbal and contend that I misrepresent him. This passage has been taken from Iqbal's lecture entitled 'Muslim Community'. This is his third important paper on the subject, and was translated into Urdu by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan as "Millat-e Bayza par ek Imrani Nazar", and read in the Strachey Hall of the Aligarh Muslim University in 1910. He states:[93]

> The establishment of a Muslim University in India is essential also for another reason. Who does not know that the task of giving moral education to the masses of our community is being performed by Ulema and preachers who are not competent to perform this task? The reason is that the quantum of their knowledge about Islamic history and Islamic sciences are very limited. For the teaching of the main principles and offshoots of religion and morality the preacher of today, besides having an understanding of history, economics and sociology, should also have a complete acquaintance with the literature and aspiration of his community. Al-Nadwa, Aligarh College, Madrasa Deoband and other

[93] Latif A. Sherwani, *Speeches, Statements and Writings of Iqbal*, 1974, pp 104-120.

similar institutions which are functioning separately cannot fulfil this great need. There should be established one central Dar-ul uloom of all these scattered educational entities where the members of the community should not only Madras Lectures reveal that so long as the Muslim intellectuals remained under the influence of Greek thinkers they paid more attention to speculative sciences. However, when they turned their attention to the Quranic teachings, they discovered that the Qur'an laid emphasis on experimental methods, because in the Qur'an, God repeatedly commands man to apply reason, to think, to use his eyes and ears, etc. This meant that through their sense perception, Muslims should evolve empirical sciences. According to Iqbal, it was against this background that the Muslims developed the experimental method and laid the foundations of empirical sciences. Europe took these empirical sciences from the Muslims and further developed what is today known as modern science and technology. Thus Iqbal believed that Muslims were the original founders of science, and if they were to learn it afresh from the West, it would not amount to adoption of the sciences of an alien culture, but to taking back from the West what they originally gave to it in their times of glory. In this belief, Iqbal desired that the broken link between the Islamic sciences and the modern sciences should be re-forged. He was convinced that this was also a very important aspect of the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam and that the new Muslim society could not be created unless the Islamic sciences were recombined with the modern sciences. It is needless to mention here that a study of the history of science would reveal that in the early stages of the development of empirical sciences, the names of Muslim scientists frequently occur. Even today some of these sciences are still acknowledged and retain their Arabic name. For instance, Algebra, a branch of Mathematics, which was a Muslim invention, still retains the same name. So is the term (alchemy) chemistry which is derived from the Arabic *Al-Kimiya*. There are numerous other terms, particularly in the science of optics and physics which have been derived from Arabic and which are still in use.

There is another fact that is worth mentioning, and it is that although Iqbal was a critic of the western civilisation, he was never opposed to modernity. He always distinguished between modernity and westernization.

To him westernization was imitating an alien culture, for which he criticised the Turks. But modernism to him was accepting the reality of change. According to Iqbal, the Qur'an commanded the acceptance of the reality of change for the progress of Muslims in all spheres and fields; otherwise they would be left behind. The Muslim could achieve *Shawkah* (Power) in the new Muslim society only when they re-established the link between Islamic and modern sciences; and recommenced the process of research, creativity, innovation and invention. You must have noted that Iqbal, in almost all his writings, particularly his poetry, is obsessed with 'the absolutely new'. He asks for a new world and a new universe because he is fed up with the old. Even his Satan pleads to God and begs for the creation of a new Adam since he is disgusted with the present one who cannot bear even his single flaw. He pleads that it is insulting for him that he is pitched against a very weak rival. So even Satan demands a new Adam.

Now what he means by a new man or a new Muslim society is that the creative potential of the Muslim community must be reviewed. In the context of creativity, Iqbal uses the expression 'innovation'. He regarded Hazrat Umar as the first innovator among the Muslims, because of the changes he had introduced, particularly his inclusion of *Istihsaan* (Equity) into the Islamic law of inheritance. Objections were raised against Hazrat Umar for introducing novelty into Islamic laws. But Hazrat Umar replied that 'novelty' is of two kinds— one is *Bid'at-e Hasna* (commendable novelty) and the other is *Bid'at -e saiyya* (condemnable novelty).[94] Iqbal endorsed the former and considered it positive, or commendable, innovation. Iqbal was of the view that the Muslims of today could progress only if they acquired the mentality of Hazrat Umar. He upheld that they should not become prisoners of the text of Qur'an; their interpretation must also be consistent with the spirit of the Qur'an. Thus according to him *Bid'at-e Hasna* or commendable innovation is worthy of consideration and should be adopted as a methodology for modern day *Ijtihad* or interpretation of Islamic law.

Now I turn to the topic 'Iqbal and the Concept of the Islamic State in the Modern Age'. I have already explained that Iqbal gives priority to the

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[94] See Iqbal's poem "Nala-e Iblees", *Javid Nama*, *Kulliyat i Iqbal* (Persian), Lahore 1981, p 725.

principle of Muslim nationhood for the establishment of a modern Muslim society. His second principle is that Islam is unthinkable without 'power'. Without 'power' you may repeatedly claim to be Muslim but you would be Muslim only in name. Economic and technological freedom must be realised along with political freedom to constitute 'power'; otherwise you are nothing but a slave and in the state of slavery no task can be accomplished. Iqbal narrates that once a Turkish freedom-fighter accompanied him to offer prayers in the mosque and was perturbed to notice that the Indian Muslims while offering prayers remained for a long time in the position of prostration (*Sajda*). He asked Iqbal as to why it was so? Iqbal replied that there was no need to be surprised because the poor slaves have nothing else to do except 'prostration' (*Sajda*).[95]

After interpreting the two major principles of "Muslim nationhood" and 'Power' Iqbal has presented his concept of a modern Islamic state in his sixth lecture, 'The Principle of Movement in the Social Structure of Islam'. This lecture is not only important, but also controversial, as most of the objections raised against the Madras Lectures pertain particularly to this lecture. Its topic is *Ijtihad* (effort, struggle). I will discuss only that part of the lecture which relates to the construction of a state or rather the question of how Iqbal thinks a modern Islamic state can be created. In this connection, the first thing to be kept in mind is that whenever Iqbal speaks of modern Islamic state, he has before his eyes those traditional models of the Islamic state with which you may also be familiar. They are Khilafat, Imamate, Amirate or Monarchy in different forms. These are the conventional types of states that we come across in the history of Islam. Iqbal does not recommend the revival of any of these models. His concept of modern Islamic state is based on three principles. But before discussing them, I would like to point out that Iqbal associates state with law-making. He wrote several letters to Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi and posed many questions in this regard. An examination of these questions, and the answers given by Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, provides very interesting and useful information. I have collected and studied these questions thoroughly, in order to find out what was in his mind. In fact, his questions are the same which disturb the mind of the Muslim youth of today, and I suppose no

[95] "Ghulamon ki Namaz," *Zarb -e Kaleem*, *Kulliyat i Iqbal* (Urdu), Lahore, 1984, pp 61-62.

satisfactory and convincing solution to these problems has been presented by our Ulema even today. For example a question asked by Iqbal to Syed Sulaiman Nadvi makes it abundantly clear why Iqbal gave so much importance to *Ijma'-i ummah*, (consensus of the community) and what its connection is with the democratic order of a modern Islamic state. He asks Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, "Can *Ijma'-i ummah* repeal *Nass-e Qur'ani* (text of the Qur'an having clear meaning)? For instance a mother can breast feed her child only for two years according to the *Nass-e Qur'ani*. Can this period be reduced or extended?" Then he asks: "Can consensus change the Quranic rules of inheritance? Some Hanafite and Mu'tazilite scholars (names of two schools of Islamic thought) believed that it was possible through *Ijma'-i ummah*. Does any such reference exist in the literature of *Fiqh* (Law)?" Such interesting questions could be asked only by Iqbal. He derives the principle of election in an Islamic state from the 38th verse of 42nd Surah of the Holy Qur'an in which it is stated that the Muslims are those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation. In this verse, the word 'Shura' has been used which may either be interpreted as 'Advisory Assembly' or as 'Consultative Assembly'. If we take it as Advisory Body, then there will arise the problem of the absoluteness of the executive authority which would not be bound by the opinion of the Advisory Body. (And this is what had been happening during the history of Islam and led to the establishment of the most perverse form of autocracy). But if it is to be considered and interpreted as 'Consultative Body' then it would be identical to an elected Assembly for the purpose of law-making. Iqbal terms this law-interpreting Assembly as the modern form of *Ijma'*. In other words, the elected representatives are authorised to make or interpret law and their law-making process becomes a kind of *Ijma' i Ummah*. But this interpretation of Iqbal has not been accepted by the Ulema. You may note that Iqbal wants to take away the right of *Ijtihad* (Interpretation of law) from the individual jurists (*Mujtahidin*) and hand it over to the elected Muslim Assembly. This is a kind of revolution which our conservative Ulema are not prepared to accept.

Before talking about the three foundational principles propounded by Iqbal on which a modern Islamic state can be built, I would like to refer to

the last paragraph of his sixth lecture in which he defines the Islamic state as "spiritual democracy". He states:[96]

> In view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we (Muslims) ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realise the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles and evolve, out of the hither partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.

It is evident from this quotation that according to Iqbal the ultimate aim of Islam i.e., the establishment of "spiritual democracy," has not yet been realised and if at all, only partially.

Now I come to the three fundamental principles of a modern state from the Islamic standpoint propounded by Iqbal. They are: (1) human solidarity; (2) equality; and, (3) freedom. Iqbal is of the view that Muslims must aspire for and realise these great and ideal principles in space— time forces us to do this, as these very principles constitute the essence of *Tawhid* (unity of God).

The question that invariably follows is as to why Iqbal refers to "human solidarity" and not to "Muslim solidarity"? The answer is that he had a vision of a modem Islamic state as a spiritual democracy. As for religious tolerance in this state, Iqbal points out that the Qur'an commands the Muslims to protect the places of worship of non-Muslims implying that it is a religious obligation of the Muslims. In this background when Iqbal talks about human solidarity, he means Muslim unity based on common spiritual aspiration and solidarity with non-Muslim citizens. On this basis it is possible to realise the ideal of human solidarity. Iqbal cities verse 40, of surah 22 of the Qur'an, which contains the Qur'anic command to protect places of worship of the non-Muslims. It states:

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[96] *Reconstruction*, pp 179-180.

> If God had not created a group (of Muslims) to ward off others from aggression, then churches, synagogues, oratories and mosques where God is worshipped most, would have been destroyed.

In this verse, the term *masajid* (mosques) occurs at the end in a descending order. First the churches of the Christians are mentioned, then the synagogues of the Jews, followed by the monasteries or oratories of the hermits, and lastly the mosques of the Muslims. How did the jurists interpret this Qur'anic verse? The early *Fuqaha* (jurists) thought that only the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) came under this protective clause. But, when Iran was conquered, Parsis or Zoroastrians were also included under it based on the reasoning that they were *Kamithl-e ahl-e Kitab* (similar to the people of the Book) and that this also bound the Mughal state to protect the places of worship and culture of their Hindu subjects.

To conclude, when the Muslims had self-confidence and were powerful, their jurists could 'extend' a Qur'anic rule of law if the conditions so demanded, and when there was an apprehension that it could lead to some problem they 'restricted' its application by temporarily suspending it. These processes of 'extension' (*Tawsi'*) and 'restriction' (*Tehdid*) are acknowledged principles in Islamic jurisprudence. Iqbal is of the view that in accordance with the needs and requirements of present times the Qur'anic rules of law pertaining to worldly affairs (*Mu'amalaat*) can be 'extended' or 'restricted' although this Power cannot be exercised by an individual or a dictator. He desires that this power be given to the elected representatives of the Muslims in the form of *Ijma'* (Consensus).

While discussing these principles, I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not arguing that a modern Islamic state can be regarded as a secular state. No, this is not my thesis, although I am inclined to put the word 'ideal' before it. If according to Iqbal the ultimate aim of Islam is to establish a spiritual democracy and not a theocracy, then how can it be defined, except as an ideal secular state? I do not call it a secular state because there exists no genuine secular state anywhere in the world. The existing so-called secular states are practically based on hypocrisy. Is the U.S. a secular state where there still exists discrimination between blacks and whites? Are Britain, France and Germany truly secular states? Is India, where the Muslims are

periodically massacred for one excuse or another, really a secular state? In reality no secular state exits anywhere in the world, but there are several types of hypocritical states. For example, the secular state of the former Soviet Russia was established on the basis of atheism. It was an anti-religious state. Similarly, Western capitalist secular democracies are indifferent to religion, as they are essentially market societies interested in selling their merchandise. But if there exists a state which respects every religion or whose aim is to establish a genuine spiritual democracy, what name could be given to such a state? I once met a Hindu scholar at a conference. He explained to me that a secular state does not mean a state which is indifferent to religion, in the sense in which it is called *la deen riyasat* or 'non-religious state'/secular state. He said that India is not such a secular state, but every religion is given full respect in it. I replied that if that was really followed then India would have been an Islamic state as contemplated by Iqbal. There would have been no periodic massacres of the Muslim minority and that in that case there would have been no need to make Pakistan.

Now let us turn to the second principle of Iqbal, i.e., the principle of equality in the modern Islamic state. To grasp it we have to consider Iqbal's social and economic ideas. For example, he believed that the Qur'an has prescribed the best remedy for all economic ills of mankind in general. He opposed capitalism with the same vigour with which he opposed socialism as economic systems. But he did not approve of the total expulsion of the forces of capital from the economic order, rather he wanted to confine it within certain specific limits. As for the Muslims, he recommended strict implementation of the Islamic Law of Inheritance and the taking of zakat, *'ushr* and *sadqa* (various taxes) by the state. Furthermore, through *ijtihad*, he desired the reinterpretation of other Qur'anic laws pertaining to taxation. For example, there is the Qur'anic command of *qul al-'afw*, i.e., give away all that you have earned above your needs for the benefit of the community. But no one will be inclined to give away his surplus wealth voluntarily for public benefit unless the state compels him to do so. In his poem on the Russian Revolution, Iqbal therefore insists, that the Muslims must delve deep into the Qur'an in an attempt to discover the Wisdom of Allah regarding *qul al-'afw*. On the basis of this Qur'anic command, he expects the modern Islamic state to improve taxation laws in order to make the state essentially a welfare state and thus realise the ideal of equality. In this connection he has also some

other suggestions pertaining to the distribution of land. According to him a landlord, under Islamic law, can only hold as much land as he is able to bring under self-cultivation and surrender the surplus to the state for distribution to the landless tenants. Iqbal also recommends the imposition of agricultural tax on land holdings in parity with the proportion of income tax. Moreover, he wants the implementation of other laws to prohibit the practice of hoarding wealth by ignoring collective rights, accumulating wealth through illegal and illegitimate economic sources, taking interest and indulging in gambling. Iqbal's concept of equality in a modern Islamic state is more or less identical to the economic ideal of a modern mixed economy. It implies that the state should invest in important industries in the public sector and at the same time accept free economy to a certain extent, by encouraging individual investment in the private sector. But the state must not nationalise industries.

Now, we can consider Iqbal's third principle of the Islamic state, i.e., the principle of 'freedom' (*Hurriyat*). I have already said that he regards 'elections' of legislative assemblies in Muslim states as a return to the original purity of Islam. So what does Iqbal mean by the term democracy? By democracy he obviously means representative or elected assemblies, because such assemblies came into existence through electoral contest among different political parties. Iqbal states that political parties emerged during the times of *Khulafa'-i- Rashidin* (Caliphs in the early period of Islam). One political group consisted of the Ansar whose candidate contested against Abu Bakr. Similarly, another political faction was that of the Muhajirin (immigrants) who, for the first time, advanced the argument that the Arabs should refuse to accept the leadership of any person who did not belong to the tribe of Quraish. This reasoning is said to have silenced the Ansar. The Ansar's claim to the leadership was that they had constituted the armies of Islam, therefore the Caliph should be elected from among them. The Muhajirin argued that their candidate would not be acceptable to all the tribes of the Arabs because they did not belong to the tribe of Quraish. Hence, the Caliph must be chosen from the Quraish tribe. The third political faction was that of Banu Hashim. They believed that the Caliph must hail only from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad and, therefore, strongly supported Ali. Thus, it is evident that there were three positions existing after the death of the Holy Prophet.

It is interesting to note that during the electoral confrontation (or rather competition) no party sought the support of the Qur'an or the Hadith (Traditions of the Holy Prophet). The appointment of a successor (Caliph) of the Holy Prophet was a political matter, to be resolved in a political manner. Their approach was pragmatic and republican as well as flexible, since it did not rigidly follow any set precedent. It is against this background that Iqbal gives priority to *Ijma'* (consensus), the present form of which is an elected Muslim Assembly. *Ijma'* is one of the fundamental principles of *Ijtihad*, the others being the Qur'an, Hadith and *Qiyas*. Iqbal opines that the right to reinterpretation of Islamic laws and giving them the shape of modern legislation must vested in the elected Muslim Assembly. He is also of the view that a body of Ulema could also be nominated to assist the Assembly as the Assembly may face difficulties in understanding the intricate points of Fiqh. However, he does not give the right of veto to the Ulema considering that their mutual differences could lead to a legislative crisis. His solution to the problem is that members of the Assembly should be acquainted with *Fiqh* and modern jurisprudence. In other words, the candidates for the Assembly in a modern Islamic state must preferably be lawyers and jurists with a command over *Fiqh*, because only such a person can perform the task of reinterpreting Islamic laws and their legislation.

Iqbal's concept of legislation is based on his philosophy of "permanence-in-change". He explains that only *Ibadaat* (religious obligations) are permanent and cannot be changed. On the other hand, *Mu'amalaat* (worldly affairs) are subject to the law of change. For instance, the timings of prayer cannot be changed, nor can the fasting period of Ramadan. But all laws pertaining to *Mu'amalaat* (civil and criminal matters) which fall into the category of worldly *Mu'amalaat* can be subjected to the law of change and may be reinterpreted in accordance with changed condition and needs, as well as with the requirements of the Muslim community. Iqbal wants to give this right to the popularly elected Assembly, Parliament or Majlis-e Shura. The task of this new Majlis-e Shura is not to advise the ruler, but to rule. It may make laws in three fields:

1. To amend existing laws so that these should conform to the injunctions of Islam.

2. To implement those Islamic laws which have not yet been enforced and

3. To legislate those laws which are not repugnant to the injunctions of Islam.

The third field is the most important because it is most extensive. Iqbal contends that the Muslims of today ought to follow Hazrat Umar in achieving their objectives of comprehending the spirit of the Qur'an and the real message of Islam for humanity.

Although Iqbal insists on transferring the right of Ijtihad from an individual Ulema to an elected Assembly which should be the sole law-making body, he notes that in spite of the conservativeness of the Ulema, the Muslims of the subcontinent are moving forward and it is the Shari'ah which has been made static or is lagging behind. What he meant to highlight is that whenever the Muslims have raised their voices for reconstruction or reinterpretation of Islamic law to suit the needs and requirements of the community, the Ulema opposed them tooth and nail. As a result, despite their opposition, Muslims have proceeded ahead whereas the Ulema have been left behind. Here I want to point out that whenever Iqbal proclaims that we are marching forward while the Shari'ah is static, he means that we are not taking the Shari'ah along with us.

Iqbal is convinced that Islam contains a dynamic spirit within itself and no one can hinder its progress with artificially imposed restrictions. He, therefore, categorically points out:

The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to re-interpret the fundamental legal principles in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Qur'an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the works of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems. (Reconstruction Lectures, p.168)

Who are the 'Muslim Liberals'? It appears that according to Iqbal these are those Muslims who have a 'reformist' approach towards the evolution of

Islamic law. Anyway, all that Iqbal has stated in this passage is unacceptable to any Alim who has a conventional approach towards Islamic law. Therefore, the way Iqbal is showing to us for the freedom of *Ijtihad* in the form of *Ijma'* and the dissemination of an enlightened or dynamic outlook in our legislative assemblies is neither acceptable to our Ulema at this stage, nor to the members of our law-making bodies, nor to the Muslim masses. The Muslims of the subcontinent may have attained political freedom but their mentalities are still enslaved by their past. They are hostages of the needs and requirements of the Muslim community of bygone centuries. When I proclaim that Imam Abu Hanifa has stated thus regarding a legal issue, it means that I need not think any further as he had already pondered the matter for all of us and for all times. But if we assert that we must exert ourselves, reconsider and reinterpret a law because it is a problem specific to our age, we are confronted with a deluge of objections. Although we claim that we are devoted to Islam, our community is surviving on double standards, the reason being that we are not courageous enough to pull ourselves out of the pit into which we have fallen, yet, at the same time we do not like to be considered cowards. Nations do not achieve emancipation through merely attaining political freedom. Real emancipation is achieved through freedom of the mind and that is the secret behind the progress of nations.

QUR'ANIC INCLUSIVISM IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Joseph Lumbard

What first drew me to the teachings of the Qur'an, and even persuaded me that they were the teachings by which I wish to live my own life, are the verses that clearly advocate an attitude of tolerance and acceptance toward people of other faiths. Verses such as:

> *Verily those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans and the Christians are those who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds, so they have their recompense with God. They shall not fear nor shall they sorrow* (2:62, 5:69),

rang true to my ear and seemed to transcend much of the religious bigotry to which human history bears witness in all too many forms. Other verses, such as, *And We have sent to every people a messenger, that they may worship God* (16:32); *And for every people there is a messenger* (10:48), seemed to speak of a universality of revelation and prophecy. I was somewhat surprised in later years to discover that the majority of Muslims have usually explained such verses in a manner that either dismisses them as abrogated (*mansukh*) or employs complex philology to explain that the apparent, literal meaning is not the real meaning.

Despite a clear message of universality, tolerance and pluralism in the Qur'an, the main line theological and hermeneutic traditions have almost always chosen to read the universal, inclusivist dimension of the Qur'an, and of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in light of more exclusivist verses such as, *Verily the religion with God is Islam* (5:3), and *Who seeks other than Islam as a religion, it will not be accepted from him* (3:85). These are trumpeted in many quarters as incontrovertible evidence that only those who follow the Prophet Muhammad shall be saved. As Imam Yahya al-Nawawi (d. 1277) has written:

Someone who does not believe that whoever follows another religion besides Islam in an unbeliever (like Christians), or doubts that such a person in an unbeliever, or considers their sect to be valid, is himself an unbeliever (*kafir*) even if he manifests Islam and believes in it.[97]

Indeed, the weight of "tradition" is undoubtedly on the side of one who prefers an exclusivist reading of the Qur'an. This has brought many Muslims, such as Farid Esack, Ali Asghar Engineer, Muhammad Arkoun and others to propose a radical break with the tradition in a favor of more pluralistic understanding of the Qur'anic message. Such figures all too often maintain that the traditional methodologies for understanding the Qur'an need to be abandoned in the name of a new hermeneutic that accounts for the nature of the times in which we live.

As Jane McAuliffe has demonstrated in *Qur'anic Christians* and more recently Yohanan Friedmann in *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*,[98] the majority of Muslim scholars throughout history have interpreted the exclusivist verses of the Qur'an more literally than the inclusivist verses. Indeed, this is the common interpretation one finds on the street and in the Mosque, where verses such as: *Verily the religion with God is Islam* (5:3), and *Who seeks other than Islam as a religion, it will not be accepted from him* (3:85) are trumpeted as incontrovertible evidence that only those who follow the Prophet Muhammad shall be saved. This is then supported by the oft-cited *hadith*,

> By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, there is no Christian or Jew of this community who hears of me and then dies without believing in that with which I was sent but that he is among the companions of the fire.[99]

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[97] Imam Yahya al-Nawawi, *Rawda al-talibin wa umda al-muftin* (Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islami, 1412/1991), vol. 10, p. 70. The translation and citation is taken from Nuh Ha Mim Keller, "On the validity of all religions in the thought of Ibn al-'Arabi and Emir 'Abd al-Qadir, a letter to 'Abd al-Matin" at www.masud.co.uk

[98] Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relation sin the Muslim Tradition*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[99] Sahih Muslim, *Kitab al-Iman*, 72.

Nonetheless, many verses clearly indicate that the new revelation brought by Muhammad is but a continuation of previous ways:

Verily We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and the tribes and Jesus, Job, Jonas, Aaron, and Solomon, and We gave David the Psalms; and messengers regarding whom We have told you stories and messengers regarding whom We have not told you stories (4:163-4);

God has laid down for you as religion that with which He charged Noah, and what we have revealed to thee, and that with which We charged Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: "Establish the religion, and scatter not regarding it." (42:13);

And We never sent a messenger before thee save that We revealed to him, saying, "There is no God but I, so worship Me." (21:25);

Some verses even imply that the content of all revealed messages is one and the same: *Nothing has been said to you save what was said to the messengers before you* (41:43). But one who wishes to substantiate the claim that all such verses allude to the validity of other faiths will often find himself thwarted by the exegetical tradition, which almost always opts for exclusivist interpretations of the Qur'an, even when philology must be strained in order to substantiate such claims. One obvious example of straining philology is found on the interpretation of *And We have sent to every people a messenger, that they may worship God* (16:32), and 10:48: *And for every people there is a messenger. When their messenger comes, they are judged with equity and are not wronged.* At face value these affirm the validity of all religions prior to Islam. But rather than being read as affirmations of the universality of revelation, they are usually presented as declarations that the Prophet Muhammad is God's Messenger sent to all humankind in every land, such that all other religions are now abrogated. But were the reference to the Prophet Muhammad alone the proper Arabic would say "the Messenger" rather than "a messenger." Though this is a very subtle and even debatable philological point, other verses which make very literal inclusivist and even universalist statements are explained away, not only through philology, but through the trump card of "tradition"—*taqlid*. Those who take such verses as confirming the validity of other religions must

therefore, as Jane McAuliffe puts it, "be compelled by the exegetical tradition to acknowledge that they are creating new interpretive strategies."[100]

The universalist verses of the Qur'an are either explained away through creative and clever philology or are claimed to have been abrogated by later revelations. Rarely are they allowed to stand alone as the unencumbered word of God. In response to this, some Muslim authors have attempted to address this question anew in recent years, privileging the "pluralistic" and universalist dimension of the Qur'an, while explaining away or even dismissing the more exclusivist verses. While such an effort gives hope for a more tolerant mode of Islamic theology and Qur'anic exegesis, works such as Farid Esack's *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism* have demonstrated such blatant disregard for traditional Islamic scholarship that they have no hope of any influence beyond a select group of Western and Westernized Muslims. The fact is that we have yet to find a way to emphasize the universalist element of the Qur'an and the Prophet's message without estranging the majority of Muslims and breaking completely from tradition.

In this paper, I propose that there is a way in which a universalist and pluralistic understanding of the Qur'anic message can be attained through a methodology that remains true to the basic principles or roots (*usul*) of Islamic scholarship and even to the methodologies, but differs in the branches (*furu'*) and fruits that are nourished and sustained through those roots. This will not necessarily be a new reading, as many (mostly Sufis) have alluded to it throughout Islamic history. But in an age of globalization when everything overlaps and interpenetrates we have reached a point that it needs to be part of mainstream Islam.

To substantiate such a procedure within the context of traditional Islamic scholarship, one can call upon a famous saying of the tradition: "The divergence of the scholars is a mercy." As Frithjof Schuon remarks in commenting upon this saying:

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[100] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 290.

> … if 'the divergences of theologians are a blessing' as Moslems say, this means that the total doctrine, contained more or less synthetically in the Revelation, is rendered explicit only by 'fragments' which are outwardly divergent, although fundamentally concordant.[101]

The outward divergence of such doctrines is what lies in the branches. Here the tree of tradition can be seen as one whose various branches produce different kinds of fruit. The fundamental concordance is the fact that they all derive from the same roots. This is to say that within Islam "orthodoxy" is not so much a body of conclusions as it is a methodology and more importantly sincere engagement with the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad—and of the teachings of the Imams for Shi'ite Muslims.

In failing to observe this when we seek to emphasize the pluralist and inclusive message of the Qur'an, we risk a fall into an iconoclastic confrontation with tradition, rather than a methodical accounting and development of its teachings. This will benefit no one, for the new conclusions attained, however true they may be, will have no soil in which to take root. As Frithjof Schuon has written:

> Dogmatic form is transcended by fathoming its depths and contemplating its universal content, and not by denying it in the name of a pretentious and iconoclastic ideal of 'pure truth'.[102]

Now, from a Qur'anic perspective, *We have sent no messenger save with the tongue of his people* (14:4). Read literally, this has important implications for how we read and understand the Qur'an. Over time Muslims have come to read the Qur'an not necessarily in the language in which it was revealed, but by applying institutionalized definitions that are far from the literal meaning many of the Arabic words had in the time of the Prophet himself. These institutional definitions often become of greater concern than the literal meaning of the words themselves, leading to what Walid Saleh has referred

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[101] Frithjof Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington, IN, World Wisdom Books, 1995), repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004,p, 4.
[102] *Stations of Wisdom*, p. 4.

to as the conflict between tradition and philology in the exegetical tradition. If we do not always keep the philology in mind and look to the meaning of the Arabic words in the historical context in which they were used, we quickly become victims of our own cultural and denominational limitations. Here tradition becomes *taqlid* rather than *sunna*.

This phenomena is very clear in the most widespread interpretation of the last two lines of *Surat al-Fatiha*: *Lead us on the straight path; the path of those whom You have blessed, unlike those upon whom is Your anger, nor those who are astray* (1:6-7). As *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* maintains, the Muslims are those on the straight path, the Christians are those who are astray and the Jews are the ones subject to God's anger. From this perspective, Judaism and Christianity are intermediary stages on the way to Islam at best. But uncritical allegiance to corrupted beliefs and practices prevents Jews and Christians from embracing the fullness of revelation that is the Qur'an.

The most straightforward example of tradition trumping philology is the interpretation of the word "*islam*." Today, as for the past 1200 years or more, the word "*islam*" is taken to indicate a particular set of beliefs and practices adhered to by a certain segment of humanity. But when the Qur'an was first revealed what did this word mean? As Toshiko Izutsu has demonstrated in his masterful books *God and Man in the Koran* and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, the original meaning of this word in pre-Islamic poetry is not only "to submit," but moreover to give over something that is particularly precious to oneself and which it is painful to abandon, to somebody who demands it. [103] So when the Prophet Muhammad first presented a "message" that claimed to be "*islam*," the words would have been understood far differently than what we understand today. Moreover, the way this word is used in the Qur'an actually provides the raw material for a very eloquent understanding of religious pluralism, one wherein all revelations throughout history are seen as different ways of giving to God that which is most difficult to give—our very selves.

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[103] Toshiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* (Salem, NC, Ayer Publishing Co., 1987), p. 199. For an extensive treatment of the over semantic field of the word Islam see Chapter 8 "Jahiliyyah And Islam."

To illustrate this, I will mention several of the Qur'anic verses regarding Islam which can be taken to present every previous revelation as a way of submitting—*islam*, rather than the historical religion of Islam. Such verses present *islam* as a way of life, not a particular creed. The first to declare himself a Muslim in the Qur'an is the Prophet Noah: *I was commanded to be among the submitters (Muslims)* (10:72). Regarding Abraham, the forefather of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Qur'an states, *Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, rather he was a pious follower, a submitter (Muslim)* (3:67). According to the Qur'an, *His Lord said to him (Abraham), "Submit!" He said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds"* (2:131). After Abraham and his son Ishmael erected the Ka'aba they prayed, *Our Lord, make us submitters unto You and make our offspring a nation submitting unto You. Show us our religious rites and turn unto us . . .* (2:128). A few verses later, it is said that both Abraham and Jacob advised their sons, *O my sons, God has chosen the way for you. So do not die but that you are submitters* (2:132). From this perspective, every prophet of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition has taught a different mode of submission to God. The creeds, laws and languages differ, but the essential message is the same. Thus the Qur'an tells us of Jews and Christians:

> *And when the Qur'an is recited to them, they say, "We believe in it. Truly it is the truth from our Lord. Truly before it [was revealed] we were submitters* (28:52).

The Apostles also implored Jesus, *We are the helpers of God! We believe! Bear witness that we are submitters* (3:52). Confirming the inner substance of these various forms of submission, the Prophet Muhammad has said: "The Prophets are half-brothers, their mothers differ and their way (*din*) is one."[104]

At face value such verses very clearly state that *islam* is a universal and perennial way of life practiced by the great founders of all previous religions/ways (*dins*) and their followers. But once "*islam*" becomes Islam, an institutional definition or conception is formed and such verses become more problematic. Rather than resorting to philology to clarify the institutional interpretation of these verses, the majority of Muslim exegetes have provided historical explanations, telling us that those who say *Truly before it [was revealed] we were submitters* are in fact those Christians and Jews

[104] Bukhari, *Kitab al-Anbiya'*, 48, Maja, *Kitab al-Fitan*, 26.

who had read the verses in their scriptures that spoke of the coming of Muhammad and thus believed in him. But the exegetes are not able to provide textual substantiations from the Bible for such assertions. Perhaps this is because, as the Qur'an itself states, previous revelations have been "altered." But this leaves us wondering how these exegetes knew this to be true. Unfortunately, the logic is quite circular: the Qur'an tells us that they are Muslims, Muslims are the people who follow the message of the Prophet Muhammad, therefore, they believed in the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the institutionalized meaning of "*islam*" has trumped the linguistic meaning.

Examples of such exegetical slight of hand abound, and often involve far more subtle maneuvering to achieve the desired end—or to make the Qur'an conform to "tradition." But to examine them in detail would require an extensive study. As with the interpretation of the word *islam* one often finds that a reading of the Qur'an that accounts for its most literal meaning yields meanings that are in conflict with the traditional Muslim understanding of other religions.

Perhaps the Qur'an itself warns that this will some day occur. For a passage that is often read as a condemnation of Judaism and Christianity by Muslims is actually a condemnation of religious condemnation:

> *They say, "None will enter the garden but those who were Jews and Christians." These are their desires (amani). Say, "Bring your proof if your are veracious." Rather one who submits his face to God and does what is beautiful, he has his reward with God. No fear is upon them and they shall not sorrow. The Jews claim the Christians are based upon nothing, and the Christians claim the Jews are based upon nothing, yet they recite the book.* ***Likewise, those who do not know, claim the like of their claim.*** *Then God judges between you on the Day of Judgment regarding that wherein you differed.* (2:111-113, Emphasis added)

In this vein, it may be wiser to read Qur'anic condemnations of people of other faiths, not as condemnations of their faiths as such, but as a condemnation of hardness of heart that causes people to read the Qur'an in accord with their own desires. We must be aware that those who follow the Prophet Muhammad are also susceptible to forgetting *a portion of what they were*

reminded of (5:13). Indeed, that Muslims would fail to follow the fundamental precepts of the Qur'an was foreseen by the Prophet Muhammad. Many *ahadith* tell us that Muslims will follow their religious predecessors, by selling God's verses for a small price and believing in some of the book and disbelieving in some of it. On one occasion, a companion asked him how knowledge could vanish when Muslims will continue to teach the Qur'an generation after generation. The Prophet replied, "May your mother weep for you! Do you not see these Jews and these Christians? They read the Torah and the Gospels and do not act in accord with them."[105] Another famous *Hadith* states:

There will soon come upon the people a time in which nothing of the Qur'an remains save its trace and nothing of Islam remains save its name; their mosques will be full, though they are devoid of guidance. Their scholars are the worst people under the sky, from them strife emerges and spreads.[106]

A well-known Qur'anic verse contends that the multiple means by which human beings worship God is part of the test that they confront in this world:

> *And for each we have made among them a law and a creed; and if God wanted He would have made you a single cummunity, but to try you regarding what has come to you, so vie in good deeds; to God is your return all of you, so we inform of that wherein you differed.* (5:48).

This reveals that there are different ways of understanding God and the relationship with God for different human collectivities. God has not revealed one law, but many laws. To each law corresponds a particular creed. Other passages confirm this by revealing that God has also revealed different rites of worship for different human collectivities:

> *For every community (umma) We have made a rite that they practice with devotion. So let them not contend with you in this matter. And call to your Lord; truly you are*

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[105] Sunan Ibn Maja, *Kitab al-Fitan*, 26.

[106] Al-Bayhaqi, *Sha'b al-iman* (Beirut, Dar al-kutub al-'ilmi, 1410/1990), vol. 2, p. 311.

upon a straight guidance. And if they dispute you, then say, "God knows best what you do. God judges between you on the day of resurrection regarding that wherein you differ." (22:67-69)

The reason for these differences in creed and practice is revealed in the following verse:

O Mankind! We have created you of a male and a female, ***and have made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another****; surely the most honorable of you with God is the most reverent; surely God is Knowing, Aware.* (49:13, Emphasis added)

From this perspective, what is most important is not whether or not one follows a particular creed or practice, but that one is reverent toward God in adhering to one of the particular modes of submission that God has revealed. In this light, the revelations of many different religions could be seen as a test—the test alluded to in 5:48. The changing face of our world has put Muslims in a position where they must ask themselves anew whether or not they have passed that test.

THE BOSNIAN PARADIGM:

The Bosnian Experience of Intercultural Relations

Nevad Kahteran

There used to be a part of Illyria, now called Bosnia,

A savage land, but rich in silver ore.

There were no long furrows of land there,

Or fields yielding abundant harvests,

But rugged mountains, and rough rocks reaching to the sky And tall towers soaring on craggy hills.

From *Stone Sleeper* by Mak Dizdar

The land of Bosnia as a cultural unity of differences is the subject matter of my presentation. But I want to point out at the beginning that the Bosnian paradigm, as the title suggests, is diametrically opposed to the currently prevailing perceptions of my country. Actually, the problem is in the point of view: are you more inclined to look at Bosnia through the differences highlighted by ethnic conflicts in the last century and, particularly, in the course of the past ten years or so, or are you more prone to take into account its thousand-year-old history of the interweaving of different religions and cultures? If you take the second point of view, then you will see Bosnia as a unique place in the world, the paradigm of the structure of the global concept, a locus where the issue of multiculturalism is not just a brilliant theoretical elaboration of this concept, but the experience of a centuries old way of life by that model. True, as a result of a tragedy of cosmic proportions which happened there before the eyes of the entire world, this Bosnian paradigm was marred and pushed aside. However, even after all those tragic events, the awareness is growing of seeking resort in this model of thinking and living as the only possible and realistic prospect.

At the very beginning of his preface to the Bosnian translation of *The Heart of Islam: Ensuring Values for Humanity*,[107] a book translated by two dear colleagues and myself within a very short period of time on the occasion of the anniversary of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the esteemed Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a remarkably faithful picture of Bosnia:

> Bosnia lies at the heart of the European continent, at once a witness to the reality of Islam, a bridge between the Islamic world and the West and for most of its history a living example of religious accord and harmony between the followers of the Abrahamic religions. Today in a world so much in need of mutual religious and cultural understanding, Bosnia can play an important role far beyond the extent of its geographic size or population, provided it remains faithful to its own universal vision of Islam threatened nowadays by forces both within and outside its borders.

In the same preface, however, Professor Nasr calls for a new ethic of responsibility by emphasising the role of Bosnia as a bulwark of a strong as well as universalist and inclusivist Islam at the heart of Europe, seeing in us people who will spread to the rest of the world the spiritual and ethical norms that constitute the heart of Islam, as well as the essence of the other revelations that God sent as guides to humanity. This is an extremely difficult task in this miserable age when ignorance is power and when the Bosnian peoples are turned more toward the differences that set them apart than toward resemblances which connect them and which are undoubtedly much more numerous.

This is the text of a lecture delivered at the Georgetown University Centre for Muslim Christian Understanding in Washington, DC, December 2002. **(Courtesy: *Sophia, Journal of the Traditional Studies*, Washington, DC, Vol. 9, No. 1, Summer, 2003)**

[107] See "Predgovor bosanskom prijevodu" ("Preface to Bosnian Translation") in S. H. Nasr, *Srce Islama: trajne vrijednosti za covjecanstvo*, translated by E. Karic, R Hafizovic and N. Kahteran (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 2002), p. 11.

The point is that Bosnia and Herzegovina has become one of many places on the map of the world where things are routinely bad. I hasten to say that I do not intend to deal here with the unfortunate events which afflicted my country for so many years and whose consequences will be felt by the people of Bosnia for years to come. All the images of the sufferings and horrors of war might be summarized by quoting a brilliant passage from a book by the Bosnian writer Dervis Susic:[108]

> .....Bosnia is not what our senses perceive from her colors and shapes. Listen to me! Bosnia is the deepest cauldron of Hell. Her bad roads, her entrenched habit, and her incurable suspicion have closed her to the beauties created by others, while her position makes her open to aggression from all four sides.

However, like the writer just quoted, anybody with any knowledge of what has happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina is aware of the fact that the evil was not brought by its inhabitants, and that "the secrets of the commitment of ordinary people, of the violence, exclusivity, and the dogged persistence of those commitments" should be sought elsewhere. This situation is maintained also by the monstrous creation called "the Dayton Bosnia," although I do bear in mind that it was the Dayton Agreement, such as it is, that brought an end to that unfortunate war. Even as I am speaking about the peace, however, I am facing a question to which I myself have no satisfactory answer, the question of the function of a philosopher in a country in which publication is virtually non-existent, in which culture is in the hands of the nation's "fathers" full of nationalist nonsense. Nevertheless, when everything is taken into account, our immersion in the sameness, in the commonalities that connect us, creates a feeling of a vital and promising attempt to extricate ourselves from the vicious circle within which we are separated by hatred, but at the same time gives rise to a sincere wish for a strengthening of our consciousness, both in ourselves and in others, that we can survive only by love, or at least by communication between individuals and communities. The Anglo-American academic community can discover some of the baroque complexity of the Balkans in the work of the authors

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[108] *Pobune* (*Revolts*) by Dervis Susic (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991), pp. 91-92.

like Michael A. Sells, who wrote *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*,[109] and *The Balkans as Metaphor*,[110] a recently published book offering a somewhat different approach to the study of the region of south eastern Europe. There are many other volumes available in English dealing with the enormous inconsistencies and complexities of the Balkan world and of Bosnia in particular.

However, the issue that I want to raise here is exactly that of the ways to avoid the stereotypes and absurdities that have characterized too long the debates on the Balkans and, regularly, those on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, I wish to mention *The Historical Atlas of Bosnia and Herzegovina*,[111] the product of nearly a decade of hard work by a team of university professors, of whom as many as five have since passed away. As you turn the pages and look at the different historical maps, most of which were put together by non-Bosnians, you cannot help wondering what the key aspects are of the prevailing stereotype of Bosnia, in the face of the irrefutable evidence about its thousand-year old continuous existence and the richness of its different identities. I therefore pose a very serious question: why not take the differences not as a Bosnian inconsistency or inadequacy but as a rich fermentation in which the West itself could take pride as proof of its inherent tolerance? Because only in that case would the previously mentioned Bosnian writer be refuted when, in another of his novels, he said resignedly:

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[109] Also translated into Bosnian. See *Iznevjereni most: religija i genocid u Bosni* (Sarajevo: Klio, 2002).

[110] The MIT Press, 2002.

[111] Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 2002. *Geographical and Historical Maps of Bosnia and Herzegovina* is the first publication of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Atlas comprises basic geographical and historical maps of Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing the centuries 'long continuity of the country's statehood. Bosnia has figured on geographical maps from the earliest times to the present, as featured in the Atlas, using old geographical and historical maps of the country found in European cartographic archive collections and now, for the first time, classified and presented to the general public.

The Atlas, which is 25.70 x 36 cm in dimensions, has 352 pages, and is printed in six colours. It comprises twelve chapters. I sincerely hope that this remarkable volume will soon become available in English or that an English supplement will be incorporated into a future edition of the Atlas.

"May the Lord have mercy on this land. Until it finds its identity, there is not much we can ask for in this country." We seem to be dealing with the principle of double standards in the case of Bosnia, since what is allowed there would never be tolerated in their own environments by those who make the most important decisions on Bosnia.

After all the unfortunate years of conflict and destruction, it is not difficult to see how the radical transformation of the global ideological geography, i.e., the fall of the system based on a bipolar distribution of power, left an indelible trace on the map of Bosnia by disfiguring the beauty of its traditional mosaic almost irrevocably. Furthermore, the collapse of the "Eastern ideological paradigm" doesn't seem to have been as painful and destructive anywhere as in Bosnia.

Yet, in today's Bosnia there is an increasing number of genuine intellectuals who hope that they can offer a corrective platform to counter the currently prevailing perceptions of Bosnia. In this sense there is indeed a need to homogenize the West in order to "unhomogenize" Bosnia. Namely, the rapid acceptance of the cultural codes of a global society is extremely attractive to Bosnian intellectuals, who are eager to be recognized as members of the world community, above all of the European Union and other Western and Euro-Atlantic associations. In Bosnia, however, this universal globalism is, unfortunately, also ethnic in character, emanating as it does from hidden ethnicity. In such a situation, the challenge we naturally face is for us to realize— in spite of the wish of such intellectuals for a non-ethnic identity— that their resistance to globalism is, in fact, a natural consequence of their nationalistic short-sightedness. What I have in mind is the failure to accept the fact that globalization on the economic plane inevitably involves globalization on the spiritual plane, which in turn means greater awareness of the sameness rather than continuing insistence on differences. Naturally, we must be fully aware that, as a small country, we are totally insignificant on the former plane, but on the latter plane we do have a great deal to offer to the modern world, which gives us a good opportunity to play an important global role, if you will allow me to paraphrase Professor Nasr's words quoted earlier.

Thus, the obvious question now is the following: how can we reinforce the aspirations for a traditionally good multicultural co-existence, shaken up and brought to the edge of survival by the unfortunate events during the period between 1992 and 1995 and by an unnatural situation maintained to this day in one way or another? Another way of putting the question is: how do we support the building of the stage for peaceful co-existence with due respect for all Bosnian peculiarities and different cultural frameworks, without their violent removal on the one hand, and without becoming prey to nationalistic nonsense on the other.

What we have said so far has brought us to a paradoxical situation With regard to the context of the events that have taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina and produced the current situation. This "country of endless inspiration," which was dismembered at all its seams, is again being watched, through the prism of the forgotten paradigm of Bosnia as it had been through many centuries of its existence, as a fertile ground for religious pluralism and understanding of all the holy forms of Abraham's family of religions as well as others. I will again refer here to Professor Nasr's book mentioned earlier, in which he says literally that Muslims must extend the hand of friendship not only to the followers of other religions, as ordered in the Qur'an, but also live together with, and show particular respect to, those who have abandoned the world of religion, i.e., the secularists. This is a very difficult task, new to both modernism and postmodernism.[112]

At this point, however, a critique suggests itself of the main modern sin, the sin of the obsession with the ego, in the business of paving the road to the forgotten Bosnian paradigm, permeated with perennial wisdom. But our critique of modernism and post-modernism is by no means an anti-Western attitude, but a perspicacious observation of the cracks of the mind that are becoming evident to the modern recipient. We could rather say that it is a true expression of the concern and apprehension for the future of humanity as a whole. Because Bosnia originated and has existed by divine providence

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[112] See my translation of "Ljudske odgovornosti i ljudska prava" ("Human Responsibilities and Human Rights"), chapter VII of Nasr's book mentioned earlier, published also by *The Herald* of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vol. LXIV, No. 7-8 (July-August 2002, Sarajevo), pp. 773-798.

at the crossroads of different worlds. Admittedly, the reestablishment of the perennial perspective transcends the finiteness of the cunning of the utilitarian and utilized minds, and we do keep finding, within the Bosnian heritage, a great deal more to be learned about its cultural peculiarities and plurality— not as mere theories or mental concepts held or advocated, but as a centuries old model of living. This is why I spoke earlier about the disfiguring of the traditional beauty of the Bosnian face, since nowadays most people know only its Frankenstein appearance, i.e., the post-Dayton situation. However, the destruction of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic identity of Bosnia is not a loss only to the Bosnian peoples and the region of south eastern Europe, but to all of humankind.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs the wisdom I have spoken about more than ever before, both from the philosophical and intellectual standpoint and, even more, in the practical sense of improvement of daily life. Furthermore, it seems that only from this angle can we implement the idea of the pluralistic unity of Europe and the world at large; this, however, needs to be clarified. Namely, we must make it clear why the concepts of modernism and post-modernism cannot be applied to Bosnia and Herzegovina as elsewhere in Europe, although, as a European country, it will become, sooner or later, one of its important members because of its centuries old devotedness to the idea of multi-cultural living.

Let me first underline the opposition between, on the one hand, the metaphysically blinded perspective of the modern mind and, on the other, the all-inclusive framework of traditional civilizations relating to the multiplicity of holy forms and ethnic genealogies. On the opposite side, the traditional world in which holy traditions influence each other implies a somewhat different way of relating to, and understanding, "the other one." Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country of multi-religious identities, in spite of the imported nationalist ideologies, must avoid the pitfall of reactionary nationalism and insist on a supranational and supra political framework for the sake of its future, although this year's elections are a setback in that sense. Therefore, issues like unity, difference, pluralism, tolerance, etc. cannot be fully resolved within the framework of modern concepts. In fact, there is a genuine need for a metaphysical perspective within which ethnic and religious differences in Bosnia could be transformed into meaningful co-

existence, and this is how the important traditional concept of unity of different religious forms can take us out of the dead end in which we have found ourselves.

However, when I refer to, for example, Will *Kymlick with his book Multicultural* Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights and Charles Taylor, the author of "The Politics of Recognition," published in the volume *Multi-culturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, as well as the most important French contribution made by Sylvie Mesure and Alain Renaut, *Alter ego: Paradoxes of Democratic Identity* as supporters of multi-culturalism, I want to ask whether or not they correspond to the Bosnian paradigm mentioned earlier.

If we approach this topic from the standpoint of the traditional understanding of Islam, but also of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, then the option of accepting the relative as the only significant category and of public banishment of the category of truth from intellectual discourse becomes suicidal and least credible in the case of any traditional society, and thus of Bosnia too. However, in order to clarify what I have just said, I ought to give brief characterizations of modernism and post-modernism, which should make it easier for us to understand the principles of perennial philosophy. In this case I will use an extract from the review of my study on perennial philosophy by someone I am very fond of, Bosnian Franciscan Professor Mile Babic from the Franciscan Theological Faculty in Sarajevo, who summarizes these ideas in a remarkable way.[113] He writes that it is symptomatic for perennial philosophy to be discussed at the present time, the time of post-modernism, and poses a direct question about what it is that perennial philosophy wants to emphasise in this post-modern era.

The point is that modernism emphasizes *oneness*, *one principle* common to all, a principle that applies to everything, which is, therefore, universal. The characteristic of modernism is *unity* and *universalism*.

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[113] See Mile Babic's review of my book in *Bosna Franciscana*, Vol. X, No. 16 (2002), pp. 230-233.

Post-modernism emphasizes plurality, difference, discreteness of every being and every culture. Every being is totally different, and every culture is totally different. The characteristic of post-modernism is *otherness*, which means that there are only many beings and many cultures, which are mutually incommensurable, with nothing connecting or unifying them. To post-modernists there can be no feature, measure, value, or principle which would be shared by all. Every human being is an island unto himself or herself, and every culture is an island unto itself. Among those different people and cultures there is no *commensurability*. Cultures are *incommensurable*. The notion of *incommensurability* best defines the spirit of post-modernism. It implies that there is nothing common to different cultures and so they cannot be measured on the same scale— they are, thus, *incommensurable*. Every culture has its own scale of measurement immanent to it, and every one is different. Comparing one culture with another is, to post-modernists, a type of violence against that culture.

Post-modernism rejects every pluralism based on different representations of one and the same principle. Post-modernism rejects *monism*, which holds that one entity is manifested only in one way, as well as *pluralism*, which considers that one entity is manifested in a number of ways. Even Aristotle said that the being is manifested in many ways. Post-modernism rejects such pluralism. In a word, post-modernism rejects every kind of monistic and pluralistic metaphysics, that is everything that unites, unifies, and brings about uniformity.

We can simply say that post-modernism rejects all that modernism advocates. Modernism advocates *monism*, and post-modernism *pluralism*; modernism advocates *commensurability*, and post-modernism *incommensurability*, modernism is in favour of *reducing* all differences to one entity, while post-modernism argues for *otherness*, incommensurability of differences to oneness; modernism advocates uniting to produce unification and uniformity, while post-modernism rejects any idea of a union or any comparison of different cultures. Modernism seeks universalism, post-modernism multi-culturalism.

In addition to the stated differences, it needs to be said that modernism favours *aggressive dogmatism*, and post-modernism *aggressive relativism*. Modernism considers the norms of a culture *infallible* and imposes them, as

such, on other cultures. This is what is called aggressive dogmatism. Post-modernists take the view that the norms of a culture are infallible only in that particular culture, which means that every culture has its own infallible norms. The norms valid only for one culture are relative. That is why we call this aggressive relativism.

Perennial philosophy mediates between, and reconciles, the opposites contrasting modernism to postmodernism; it converts the opposites into differences which are part of an all-inclusive single entity. What modernism and postmodernism viewed as opposites are now different manifestations of one and the same truth. Perennial philosophy reconciles dogmatism and relativism by claiming that the one and the same truth is *universal*, that it is manifested in contingent historical (relative) facts. In this way, perennial philosophy also reconciles universalism and multi-culturalism.

Perennial philosophy demonstrates that differences and oneness are not mutually exclusive. Perennial philosophers assume that all philosophies agree in essence, that all religions agree in essence, that all philosophies and religions agree in essence. In this way, perennial philosophy overcomes the split (opposition) between the mind and faith, between philosophy and religion. And today the opposition between the mind and faith (science and religion) has reached its peak. Today we have made of science an ideology on one side, that is the mind which makes itself absolute, and made an ideology of religion on the other side, that is religion that makes itself absolute. Only truth is absolute, not religion. Perennial philosophy directs all religions, philosophies, and sciences toward the transcendental One, the One which is revealed, but which no revelation— or all revelations taken together— can exhaust. Finally, the most important thing is for us to become aware of the fact that while we are immersed in one horizon of thought, we must by no means allow all others to elude us.

Let us summarize what has been said so far. Post-modernism is opposed to the assumptions of modernism in many ways, but not— as Perennialists will splendidly observe— toward seeking fresh evidence of the reality of the Holy, regardless of what we name It and how we identify It. In fact, post-modernism tries to deconstruct the holy structures of religion and even the

holy texts themselves.[114] While modernism emphasises rationality, post-modernism, as we can see, rejects even the knowledge obtained by means of man's limited mind. Hence, we can see immediately that, on the practical plane, the issue of applicability of these concepts to Bosnia and Herzegovina must be seen in a somewhat different light. But what, then, is the criterion suitable for the Bosnian reality?

Obviously the answer does not lie in mere refutation of, or confrontation with, these modern and post-modern Western philosophical traditions. We would rather say that the answer could be found in a fruitful association of controversial issues and in an improved understanding of the standpoints themselves and of the issues involved. Therefore, the goal is not overcoming those who think differently and who pray to God and invoke His Name in a way different from our own. On the contrary, the goal is to act creatively together and compete in the struggle for the general benefit of all humanity. This is the forgotten wisdom of Bosnia, the immersion in sameness rather than in differences, for which I am infinitely grateful to my first teachers of this perennial wisdom— my beloved parents. There is still a huge reservoir of that wisdom that can be tapped for meaningful inter-religious dialogue and joint foundations acceptable to everybody.

I believe it is generally known that in accordance with this perennial wisdom there exists a universal teaching by which different religions are largely mutually confirmable, a teaching originating from the Unity of the Divine Principle, which comprises all the teachings, metaphysically and practically. This teaching respects individual forms of each holy tradition, the details derived from the Source itself, which means that there is a realistic possibility of dialogue and mutual understanding among all nations. Thus, this teaching offers us something that we cannot find in the various modern and post-modern philosophical premises, those that constitute them and the others that cause their decomposition after a while, going on in that way for ever and ever. Hence, the existence of this teaching in Bosnia, as it was expressed for centuries there, is far more important than the different ways

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[114] See S.H. Nasr, "Islam at the Dawn of the New Christian Millennium," published in *Encounters*, 5:2 (1999), pp. 129-154.

in which it was expressed, even than the heresy that Bosnia was not infrequently accused of— both from the East and the West. Namely, to those from the East we are very bad Muslims, to those from the West we are equally poor Christians and Jews. However, I firmly believe that we shall be better Muslims, Christians, and Jews only if we are willing to follow the dominant principle I have just spoken about.

I am not arguing for any kind of heresy but for persevering action with regard to human differences in order to achieve the greatest possible measure of traditional harmony in Bosnia, whose lack for the past ten years has been witnessed by the entire international community. Naturally, as a result of the unfortunate events that have taken place during that period, Bosnia has been open for too long to a variety of foreign influences, including even those of fundamentalism, which represents a greater break with the Bosnian tradition than the arrival of modernism. For genuine traditions, of whatever provenance, have never preached terror and violence.

I also want to point out a social pathology of the contemporary world which makes people accustomed to the presence of violence as something perfectly normal and logical. People have developed too intimate a relationship with danger and the presence of death. The attitude of the Bosnian academician Muhamed Filipovic[115] seems to me to be crucial with regard to this topic. He claims that terrorism in the modern world originates from the simple fact that the contemporary way of life is impregnated with violence, gratuitous violence totally unrelated to any beliefs or theories. Therefore, violence and terrorism are, according to him, a logical manifestation of the modern way of life, penetrating all cultures and religions from outside, without being in any way connected to their own premises and teachings. In that case terrorism cannot be, *eo ipso*, derived from the premises of religiosity. In fact, speaking about the madness of power, he claims that we are living against nature and that this backfires in such a way that we are no longer capable of clear distinction between good and evil, that we have lost the sense of the ethical, and that we ourselves are part of a great

[115] See *Islam i teror*, by Muhamed Filipovic (Sarajevo: El Kalem, 2002).

pragmatic machine of exploitation and destruction, while terrorism is only the most direct and the most precise expression of such a state of affairs.

Finally, I think that we can agree that the search for causes of terror cannot by any means be located in the sphere of various faiths and ideologies, especially not in the sphere of Islamic belief, since it is absolutely obvious that terror is something that is much more deeply rooted in the modern way of life. Moreover, the actual appearance of terrorism is an expression of our contemporary European or Western civilization and of some of its features, of which we are either not aware or which we deliberately ignore. We do not seem to know how to tackle these features, although we do know that our present difficulties originate from them.

In conclusion, allow me to clarify what it is that makes me continue with my adherence to this universalist perspective, which, I sincerely hope, I have presented clearly enough. The question then is what is the reason supporting an inclusivist attitude in understanding the world and the world processes from the Islamic perspective, since Islam is that *topos* from which this understanding starts in the case of Bosnian Muslims and my own original impulse? Is it perhaps because, in the words of the brilliant Bosnian writer, Mesa Selimovic, we have always been plagued by misfortunes, so that we are afraid of loud laughter, we are afraid that we might anger evil forces which always lurk around Bosnia."[116] I feel obligated to quote his now famous passage about Bosnian Muslims:

> History has never made such a joke with anyone else as it did with us... we had been torn away and disconnected and were not accepted. Like a branch of the river which had been separated from the mother river by a torrential flood, and had neither stream nor mouth, too small to be a lake and too big for a soil to absorb it within itself.
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> We live at the crossroads of the worlds, on a border of nations; we bear the brunt for everybody, and we have always been guilty in the eyes of

[116] *Tvrdjava* (*Fortress*), p. 31.

someone. The waves of history break themselves over our backs, as on a reef.

From this position, faithfully described by this writer, and in spite of all the troubles concomitant with the location in which we found ourselves, sprang and continues to grow this universalist and inclusivist perspective, which is a testimony to the constructive role of Islam that it plays and will play in the future of Europe. To me personally, as a Hafiz-al-Qur'an,[117] this universalist perspective has enabled to avoid, without any shame or self-love, falling prey to any of today's prevailing "philosophies of the herd" in Bosnia, i.e., to that parochial philosophy and narrow-mindedness, which are unfortunately present in Bosnia at a moment when it is most essential to affirm the universal perspective of our original impulses. As for the Bosnian Muslims, they are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that universalism in its deepest sense is the very *raison d' étre* of Islam. Hence the support of the Bosnian model and paradigm is not a matter of choice, but the issue which makes up or breaks up the picture of the modern world, reinforcing or weakening the trust in the unity of that world.

HI would like to conclude by conveying the opinion of a well known philosopher that where there is danger, there is also the possibility of salvation, which, in fact, is a paraphrase of the following statement in the Holy Qur'an:

> *So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief: verily, with every difficulty there is relief.* (Al-Inshirah, 5-6).

Wa ma tawfiqi Illa bi'llah

[117] Some one who has memorized the whole of the Qur'anic text. (Editor)

THE CHRISTIAN USES OF SECULAR POSTMODERNISM

Merold Westphal

Not surprisingly, postmodern philosophy derives its name from its critique of modern philosophy, especially as developed by Descartes and Hegel. In Descartes the marks of modernity are three: certainty, clarity, and purity. Put into theses it is the triple claim: 1) that philosophy can and must attain complete certainty (objective certainty, not mere subjective certitude) about matters of ultimate importance; 2) that philosophy's medium can and must be clear and distinct ideas, a medium so transparent as to be no medium at all but the very light in which things show themselves as themselves; and 3) that philosophy can and must be presuppositionless, free from immersion in the particularity and contingency of tradition and thereby free for knowledge that in its certainty and clarity will be universal and necessary. It is easy to see that the second and third theses are in the service of the first.

Hegel shares these ideals but has his own distinctive version of how they are to be achieved. Thus 1) certainty is to be achieved not through methodological doubt but through the ontogenetic recapitulation of the phylogenetic pathway of doubt and despair that is traced in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[118] 2) Clear and distinct ideas are not immediately at hand but become available only through a thoroughgoing critique of the categories of thought such as we find in the *Science of Logic*.

3) While beginning in the right way is important if philosophy is to be unconditioned by the contingencies and particularities of history,[119] Hegel has learned from Kant (and Spinoza) that only that is unconditioned which

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[118] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), Introduction. Cf. Joseph Flay's commentary on the *Phenomenology* entitled *Hegel's Quest for Certainty* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984).

[119] *Phenomenology,* Introduction and p. 58. *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), "With What Must the Science Begin."

includes the totality of conditions. The juxtaposition of completeness with certainty and clarity in Kant's Preface to the First Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*[120] is ominous from Hegel's perspective. For the certainty and clarity Kant is able to achieve at the level of the Understanding, without the completeness demanded by Reason, which aspires to render itself unconditioned through possession of the totality of conditions, leaves us without the Knowledge we need. The Understanding itself, whether as common sense or as Newtonian physics, gives us the conditioned and some conditions, without being able to provide the totality of conditions; and Kant's critical philosophy only shows how the Understanding works, declaring that Reason's demands cannot be met. Our "knowledge" is only of phenomena and appearances and not of noumena and things in themselves, and, what is worse, what Kant takes to be of ultimate importance, God, freedom, and immortality, do not even appear as phenomena. So Kant admits, "I have found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith."[121]

Hegel gives a historical sense both to the way thought is conditioned by what is contingent and particular, its embeddedness in social practices and traditions of interpretation, and to becoming unconditioned (presuppositionless) by embodying the totality of the conditions. Thus philosophy can reach its goal only at the infamous "end of history," the point at which it is possible to survey the whole development of the human spirit and encompass all moments in a systematic totality.

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[120] A xiii-xv.

[121] *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxx. Though Kant belongs to the history of "modern" philosophy, postmodern philosophy sees in his critical finitism the beginnings of a deconstruction of modernity's claims. Thus Derrida can be read as a kind of Kantian. See Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) and Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Difference* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1986). Derrida himself writes, "I don't know, one has to believe..." *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 129. Cf. "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

The True is the whole," we are told, and the System of Science which articulates the True in Absolute Knowing is possible only now that a "new era" has dawned. Science is "the crown of a world of Spirit..."[122] In other words, speculative philosophy is always ideology. "Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts."[123] Only because the age to which it is relative is itself absolute as the culmination of the historical process can philosophical thought itself be Absolute Knowing.?[124]

The Science of Logic, no less than the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is presented as "its own time apprehended in thoughts." It's opening sentence complains, "The complete transformation which philosophical thought in Germany has undergone in the last twenty-five years and the higher standpoint reached by spirit in its awareness of itself, have had but little influence as yet on the structure of logic."[125] Aristotelian logic stands in need of "total reconstruction; for spirit, after its labours over two thousand years, must have attained to a higher consciousness about its thinking and about its own pure, essential nature."[126] It is only because spirit has reached its maturity that the Logic can be understood "as belonging to the modern world"[127] yet still be the "Science" rather than ideology or *Weltanschauung*. Reason has its presuppositions, to be sure; but as the historically emergent, systematic totality of the history of spirit, it no longer has a partial perspective but

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[122] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 6-11. For the theme of the "new era" in various texts, see Schlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), Ch. 4, especially pp. 64, 71-72, 74.

[123] *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p. 11.

[124] For an interpretation of the Phenomenology in these terms, see Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (3rd ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[125] *Science of Logic*, p. 25. Repeating this complaint a page later, he continues, "However, once the substantial form of the spirit has inwardly reconstituted itself, all attempts to pre-serve the forms of an earlier culture are utterly in vain."

[126] *Science of Logic*, p. 51.

[127] *Science of Logic*, p. 42.

grasps the totality in its organic unity. Because its presuppositions no longer function like all penultimate presuppositions to define a particular point of view, it can be said to be presuppositionless.

Not surprisingly, the recurrent postmodern complaint against modernity's totalizing thinking is most obviously directed against Hegel. But the sense is strong that the features of "modernity" that are most explicitly in Descartes and Hegel are far more widespread than might at first be suspected."[128]

Postmodern philosophy is overwhelmingly secular. Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God rumbles like a *basso continuo* beneath the various critiques of modernity.[129] Derrida tells us, "I quite rightly pass for an atheist"[130] and his "religion without religion"[131] turns out to be religion without God. Other French postmodernists are without nuance in their atheism and profess no private religion. On the German side of the street,

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[128] Descartes is a paradigm of foundationalist epistemology, while Hegel's holism is a paradigm of anti-foundationalist thinking. So that is not the issue between modern and postmodern philosophy. Postmodern philosophy tends to be holistic, but, for quasi-Kantian reasons, without the Whole. Moreover, those reasons tend to cut against Descartes' foundationalism as much as against Hegel's holism with the Whole.

[129] See, for example, Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, four volumes as two, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); and "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

[130] See *Circumfession* in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 155. For Derrida's gloss on this peculiar formulation, see Mark Dooley's interview with Derrida in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 32.

[131] For a fine overview, see John D. Caputo *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Heidegger insists that whatever may be true of the philosopher, philosophy itself must be atheistic.[132]

It is important, however, to notice two things here. First, the postmodern philosophers neither appeal to older arguments against the reality of God nor do they produce new arguments of their own. They speak as if it were axiomatic self-evident that we live in a world without God. Their work is in the mode (un)faith seeking understanding. Second, their arguments against philosophic modernity are not conceptually linked to atheistic premises. They see modernity forgetting that we are human, all too human and, to the degree that their arguments are successful, they show that we human thinkers, speakers, writers, and readers are not God; but they do not show that no one else is.[133] It is one thing to show that this cat, say, is not a lion, but quite another thing to show that there are no lion Given these two observations, one can say of postmodern philosophy what Pa Ricoeur has said about psychoanalysis:

> My working hypothesis ... is that psychoanalysis is necessarily iconoclastic, regardless of the faith or nonfaith of the psychoanalyst, and that this "destruction" of religion c be the counterpart of a faith purified of all idolatry. Psychoanalysis as such cannot 1 beyond the necessity of iconoclasm. This necessity is open to a double possibility, that of faith and that of nonfaith, but the decision about these two possibilities does not re with psychoanalysis ... The question remains open for every man whether the destruction of idols is without remainder.[134]

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[132] For the relevant passages and an interpretation of them as methodological atheism, see Merold Westphal, "Heidegger's *'Theologische' Jugendschriften"* in *Overcoming Onto-Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

[133] For this kind of analysis of the famous "death of the author" motif in Foucault Derrida, and Barthes, see Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard and the Anxiety of Authorship *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXIV, 1 (March, 1994), pp. 5-22.

[134] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 230 & 235.

In *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism*,[135] I extends Ricoeur's analysis to all three thinkers he identifies as the "masters" of the "school, of suspicion"[136]— Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. There the "religious uses of modern atheism" turn out to be modes of Lenten self-examination, individual and corporate, in the attempt, with God's help, to discover and uproot the idolatry the always insinuates its way into faith.

Subsequently I have found it helpful to extend this strategy to the secular postmodernism of the twentieth century. My triple claim is that whether we are talking about the hermeneutics of suspicion in its modern mode (Marx and Freud or its postmodern posture (Nietzsche) or about subsequent secular postmodernism which draws heavily at times on Marx and Freud as well as Nietzsche, a) the critiques are all too true, all too much of the time; b) they neither logical] presuppose nor entail an atheistic ontology; and 3) they can be recontextualize within the framework of a Christian understanding of creation and the fall. I relation to creation, postmodernism can be read as a hermeneutics of finitude which expresses, however unintentionally, the radical difference between Creator and creature. Thus St. Paul insists that "we walk by faith, not by sight" and that"we have this treasure [the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God] in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Cor. 5:7, 4:4-7). I read the metaphor of clay jars epistemically and not just ethically, anticipating the subsequent contrast between faith and sight, especially the autonomous sight which is the hallmark of the Enlightenment. Secular postmodernism can also be read as a hermeneutics of suspicion which expresses, however unintentionally, the noetic effects of the fall. St. Paul teaches that "all ungodliness and wickedness... suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). I read this to signify not just outright denial but "editing" to bring the truth within various human comfort zones and putting revealed truth to work in the service of human, all too human projects.

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[135] (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), originally published (Grand Rapid MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

[136] *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 32.

These latter two forms of suppression are the idolatries that are the target of Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom, which permeates his entire authorship. If Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are the founding fathers of Christian and atheistic existentialism, respectively, we can also see them playing the same roles in relation to postmodernism. Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian speculation has its roots in the passion of faith and its target in the totalizing thinking in which he finds modernity to culminate. Thus his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, writes, "Existence itself is a system – for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and conclusiveness correspond to each other, but existence is the very opposite"[137] In Kierkegaard we see the possibility of a Christian postmodernism, one which finds in the paradox of the Incarnation and the offence of the Atonement a divine alterity that "shatters" the cogito[138] and "supplements" the system.[139] So we can ask the question, What uses might Christian thought, which has its own postmodern possibilities, have for the secular postmodernisms of the twentieth century?

Most of the thinkers who are called postmodern do not call themselves by that name. But Jean-Francois Lyotard has at least described what he calls "the postmodern condition" and given us the closest thing we have to its definition. He uses the term 'postmodern' to describe "the condition of

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[137] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), I, 118. Derridean deconstruction can be read as a sustained argument for the later claim, namely that the totality that would convert any faith into sight is simply not available to any human knower, thinker, speaker, writer, or reader. On this point, Christian and secular postmodernism are in complete agreement. See note 16 above and my "Kierkegaard's Climacus— a Kind of Postmodernist," *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).

[138] The term is Paul Ricoeur's, who associates this shattering with Nietzsche but could just as easily have linked it to Kierkegaard. See *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 11-16.

[139] Jacques Derrida speaks of the "dangerous supplement," dangerous because what is open to supplementation is not the totality that the System claims to be. See *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 141-64.

knowledge in the most highly developed societies,"[140] and he writes, "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."[141] Since he calls metanarratives grand narratives and since the biblical story that stretches from Eden to the New Jerusalem, from "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3) to the city that "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23), is a grand narrative indeed, it is often assumed, by friend and foe alike, that postmodern incredulity is the antithesis of Christian faith. But a closer look shows that this is not the case. There is something iconoclastic, to be sure, about this incredulity, but whether "the destruction of idols is without remainder" remains to be decided.

The first thing to notice is that the metanarratives that concern Lyotard are those of modernity, and biblical faith has not been a conspicuous component of modern philosophy. Nor does Lyotard mention the Christian story. He makes allusions to thinkers like Descartes, Locke, and Adam Smith, but his primary focus is on Hegel and Marx. Their metanarratives, once called philosophies of history, have often been described as secularized versions of the biblical story. Modernity, either as the extant capitalist nation state or as the classless society about to be brought in by the revolution, is the eschatological fulfilment of history. But in the context of Hegel's pantheism or Marx's atheism the God of the Bible has quite disappeared from the scene. These stories are no longer the biblical story.

That leads to a second important observation, namely the radical, threefold difference between the metanarratives of modernity and the grand narrative of Christian faith. First, the former are *meta*narratives, and for philosophers meta-languages are second order discourses about first order discourses, in this case the scientific theories of which modernity is so proud. They are the narratives within which the non-narrative discourses of modernity are placed. The first order discourses of Christian faith include

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[140] N. B. He purports to be describing something already "out there," not seeking to introduce, much less to impose something new.

[141] *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. xxiii-xiv.

liturgy, sacred music, preaching, creed, and catechesis. But so far are these from being non-narrative discourses that the biblical story is their very heart and soul. So we can call that story, grand as it is, a *mega*narrative rather than a *meta*narrative to signify that it belongs essentially to all the first order discourses of the Christian faith. Prior to scholarly reflection, and subsequent to it as well, that faith is nothing but placing the life of the believer and the believing community within that story, hearing it, believing it, telling it, and trying to live it. The grand narrative does not first come on the scene with the metadiscourses of Christian faith, the scholarly reflection of biblical and systematic theology. It is rather the task of these discourses to be faithful to the mega-narrative to which they owe their existence.

Second, if we ask why modernity finds it necessary to place its non-narrative discursive practices within the framework of some metanarrative, Lyotard's answer is direct and simple: legitimation. Premodern societies, he argues, legitimate their language games, the complex mixture of discursive and non-discursive practices, with the help of narratives. Lyotard seems to be thinking of both myth and biblical history at this point. But the scientific discourses of modernity have tended to discredit these narratives in modern eyes and, ironically, leave both themselves and the non-theoretical, political and economic practices with a legitimation deficit. To keep this from becoming a legitimation crisis, modernity hires philosophers to tell it the grand stories, which now function precisely as metanarratives, that will legitimate its practices.

But the biblical story has normative significance in a very different way. Its proper function is more nearly delegitimation than legitimation. It tells the story of what God is up to in human history in such a way as to make clear: a) that human practices, discursive and non-discursive, personal and collective, are legitimate only to the degree that they are in conformity with and in the service of God's purpose, God's sovereignty, God's kingdom; and b) that the human story is always one of incomplete conformity to God's requirements and of service to human, all too human purposes, sovereignties, and kingdoms. It is the constant reminder of what is obvious to honest observation in any case, that in spite of the grace that invites us to conformity and service, the saints remain sinners and that the church is not

the Kingdom. The New Jerusalem is an object of hope and thus of faith but not yet of sight.

This difference about legitimation can also be expressed as a difference about totality. Within the Hegelian and Marxian stories, our practices and our theories mutually reinforce each other, and there is no need to go beyond them. Together they form a closed circle, a self-sufficient whole. Metanarratives are instances of totalizing thinking. By contrast, to live within the Christian meganarrative is to know the perennial penultimacy of both our theories and our practices. We see "through a glass, darkly," "in a mirror dimly," in an "enigma" (1 Cor. 13:12). Moreover, "what we shall be has not yet been revealed. What we know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The believer and the believing community participate in the Kingdom; they are changed by its presence within them and they bear witness to it by word and deed. But they do not confuse their present life with the Kingdom, which they await in hope.[142]

Third, the metanarratives of modernity are the product of the philosophers hired by modernity to make it solvent by solving its legitimation deficit. By contrast, the biblical meganarrative is told by prophets and apostles and, in the gospels, by a Son who is greater than the prophets who came before and the apostles who came after him. These were not exactly welcomed by the "modernities" of their own time. Nor is this surprising, since their purpose was not to legitimate the practices of their times. Modernity's philosophers present their grand stories as the flowering and fruit of human reason. There assumption is that deepest truth is already within us and needs, as it were, only to be recollected (with the help of their genius).

By contrast, the biblical narrators present a word from the God whose thoughts are not human thoughts and whose ways are not human ways (Isa. 55:8). Thus St. Paul insists that the word of the cross (ὁλὸγος τοϋ σταυροϋ) is

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142 The Marxist revolutionary awaits the classless society, but in a different mode, confident that the theory and practice already in hand are sufficient for the "church" (read: party) to bring about the "Kingdom" (read: classless society) without any wisdom or power from without (read: God).

a σκάυδλαου (offence, stumbling block) in Jerusalem and simply foolishness in Athens. "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Here the assumption is a) that revelation is necessary to go both *beyond* created reason and *against* sinful reason, not only because we do not already possess the truth but because we lack the ability to recognize it as the truth even if someone should present it to us,[143] and b) that both its form and its content embody a heteronomy that challenges the modernity's pretensions to epistemic and moral autonomy.

In other words, properly understood, Christian faith is very different from both modernity and the philosophies to which it turns, willing, all too willing to justify itself (Luke 10:29). The Christian uses to which secular postmodernism can be put will be to remind us of this difference. Lyotard's analysis of modernity's metanarratives, which enables us to see how different is the Christian mega-narrative, embodies at least three such reminders for Christian thinkers who have ears to hear them.

First, there is a delegitimation motif, directed against all forms of triumphalism, the implicit realized eschatology of complacent assimilation of those who purport to be citizens of the City of God into the human, all too human cities in which they find themselves. This is not because the biblical story is not a story of grace as well as law, of mercy as well as judgment; it is rather because grace and mercy make no sense apart from divine law and judgment. The word of forgiveness is not good news to those who feel no need of it; and the word of reconciliation can only be puzzling to those whose God has been edited down to being the *imprimatur* of the language games they all too comfortably play.

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143 For this account of the difference between reason as recollection and revelation as divine gift, see Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 9-54. Cf. "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," in Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, same translators and press, pp. 93-108.

This is not to say, of course, that discourses that call themselves Christian cannot function as ideology. Indeed, all too often, both at the level of first order discourses (e.g. preaching) and second order discourse (e.g. academic theology), the prophetic, apostolic, messianic No has been edited out in favour of a discourse that legitimates "us", often by self-righteously vilifying "them", whoever they may be at any given time. The suggestion is rather that heard through the ears of faith, Lyotard's version of secular postmodernism can be heard as an editorial "stet"— a call to restore what has been edited out.

Second, there is a specifically epistemic version of this reminder. Because the Christian meganarrative belongs essentially to every first order Christian discourse, it is to be understood as kerygma rather than apologetics. In other words, because its origin is revelation and not human reason, it is a matter of faith and not of sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The primary task of theology as second order scholarly reflection on Christian discourse is to guard against the ever present temptation to dilute the heteronomy of its form as revelation and its content as counter-cultural in every epoch of human history. If there is a secondary, apologetic task, it is to articulate to believer and unbeliever alike,[144] the inner rationale of the prophetic/ apostolic/ messianic word in terms of which it makes sense to the believer. But this task of faith seeking understanding is different *toto caelo* from showing that the word of the cross makes sense to the wisdom of this world, which both the believer and believing community may well have internalized without fully realizing the opposition between the word of the cross and the wisdom of the world. Lyotard can remind the believer who has ears to hear that faith is willing to appeal with Socrates to "the superiority of heaven-sent madness over man-made sanity."[145]

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[144] Is it not always the case that the primary consumers of apologetic discourse are believers?

[145] Compare Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 23 with Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244d. Where St. Paul speaks of offence and foolishness, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms speak of offence and madness, making the same point that the world's wisdom is not the criterion of Christian faith but ultimately a form of resistance to it.

Third, Lyotard's analysis can be a reminder, however unintentional, that theology needs to guard against becoming so "scientific" that it forgets its narrative origin and purpose. In the case of biblical theology, this happens when it desires to ground itself in historical criticism to such a degree that it tells us more and more about the (supposed) history of the text (both in terms of its production and transmission, the so-called "higher" and "lower" criticisms) and less and less about the *Heilsgeschichte* to which the text points and in which it belongs. In the case of systematic theology, this happens when the discourse becomes so metaphysical (or, for that matter, so existential), so wedded to categories whose provenance is Athens rather than Jerusalem, that "the mighty acts of God in history" are reduced to parables. The temporal self is supposed to relate directly to eternity, defined by static categories of metaphysical essence or existential possibility which render historical mediation unnecessary if not ultimately impossible.

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The metaphysical version of this flight from the Christian meganarrative has been called onto-theology by Heidegger. In his critique of "the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics"[146] we encounter another landmark of postmodern philosophy. It is secular insofar as it fits fully within Heidegger's requirement that philosophy be atheistic; but in this case Heidegger himself points to its possible Christian uses.

Heidegger's definition of onto-theology comes in two stages and so, correspondingly, does his critique. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is the paradigm for Stage One. In the text that came to be known by that name, Aristotle starts out to do ontology, to give an account of being as such— not, like the other sciences, this or that specific region of being, but the entire domain of being in terms of its most universal features. But he ends up doing theology, for him to complete his account he finds it necessary to posit the Prime Mover. The result is not two sciences but one, appropriately named onto-theology. *It*

[146] *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 42). The task of "overcoming metaphysics," which is so central to Heidegger's later thought, stems precisely from the fact that metaphysics is onto-theology.

is the theory that posits a Highest Being who is the key to the meaning of the whole of being.

Heidegger thinks Aristotle is anything but unique; rather, this structure informs the entire history of metaphysics "from Anaximander to Nietzsche,"[147] with Plato and Aristotle, Leibniz and Hegel, and Nietzsche, yes, Nietzsche as paradigmatic instances. Usually Heidegger doesn't even mention Christian theology, and when he does it is to note that metaphysics is older than Christian theology[148] and that scholastic theology "is merely a doctrinal formulation of the essence of metaphysics."[149] It is clear that a wide variety of beings, even Nietzsche's will to power, can play the role of the Highest Being who is the key to the whole of being and that the Christian God is only one of these. But at this stage Christian discourse is inevitably onto-theological, and not just in its scholastic forms. As soon as God is affirmed as Creator in one or another first order discourse (e.g., hymn, creed, sermon), we have a Highest Being who is the key to the meaning of the whole of being.

So what's the objection? What's wrong with this? At this stage, Heidegger's answer is that onto-theologically constituted metaphysics in all its forms is *Seins-vergessenheit*. He takes it to be the task of philosophy to think Being, which is not to be identified with any being, even the Highest Being. Metaphysics is the forgetting of Being simply because in its preoccupation with the Highest Being it never leaves the realm of beings to thing the Being of beings. This critique will have force only for those who 1) wish to be philosophers and 2) accept Heidegger's account of the philosophical task; in other words, it will have force only for the true believers of the Heideggerian church. The Christian theologian need not be under any compulsion to be a philosopher, as Heidegger himself points out; and the Christian philosopher is free to operate with a different understanding of the philosophical task,

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147 "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics', in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cam-bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 280.

148 *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 147.

149 *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987), IV, 209.

especially since 1) Heidegger has had great difficulty explaining what it means to think Being and 2) since 'Being' so often functions in his thought as a surrogate for 'God'.

So we turn to Stage Two, where Heidegger extends his definition of onto-theology. He asks the question, "How does the deity enter into philosophy, not just modem philosophy, but philosophy as such? And he answers that "the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it"[150] In other words, God can be taken into account by philosophy only if God is willing to play philosophy's game on its terms and in the service of its project. Heidegger describes that project in terms of such notions as representational thinking and calculative thinking, which try to bring all beings under the control of the principle of sufficient reason. He tells a complex story,[151] but we can summarize it by saying that onto-theology is now to be understood not merely as affirming a Highest Being who is the key to the whole of being but also as using that Highest Being to explain the whole of being, *to render the whole of being intelligible to human understanding*. It is at this point that onto-theology becomes an instance of totalizing thought.

Here at Stage Two of his account, Heidegger has two further critiques. First, the onto-theological project seeks to eliminate mystery from the world and from our understanding of it. Heidegger's own engagement with poetry and poetic thinking is his positive attempt to reawaken the sense of mystery that modernity has sought to suppress.[152] His critique of modern technology is his negative protest against the hubris of the demand that the whole realm of beings be subject to human mastery, first in thought and then in action.[153]

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[150] *Identity*, pp. 55-56.

[151] Especially in *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991). For an overview, see the title essay of *Overcoming Onto-Theology*.

[152] See, for example, the essays collected in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) and *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

[153] See, for example, the essays collected in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

Second, echoing Pascal's contrast between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Kierkegaard's contrast between the system and personal faith, Heidegger complains that in the service of its project metaphysics resorts to such abstract concepts as *causa prima, ultimo ratio, and causa sui*, with the result that even when the Highest Being is called 'God' the term is religiously meaningless. The right name for "the God of philosophy" is *causa sui*, he tells us, but we "can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui* man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god."[154]

While the *Seinsvergessenheit* critique that accompanies Stage One of Heidegger's account of onto-theology has no significant Christian uses, this double critique that accompanies Stage Two does. In fact, Heidegger suggests as much himself in the following three important passages.

> The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as causa sui, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.[155]

This "god-less" thinking might take the form of silence about God, as in Derrida's non-theological appropriation of negative theology and Heidegger's own philosophy.[156]

> Someone who has experienced theology in his own roots, both the theology of the Christian faith and that of philosophy, would today rather

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[154] *Identity*, p. 72.

[155] *Identity*, p. 72. The "god-less" thinking to which he refers may include not only his own philosophy with its commitment to methodological atheism, but also Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God. See "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'" in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

[156] See "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Derrida and Negative Theo-logy*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992); and "*Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum) in On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

> remain silent about God when he is speaking in the realm of thinking. For the onto-theological character of metaphysics has become questionable for thinking, not because of any kind of atheism, but from the experience of a thinking which has discerned in onto-theo-logy the still *unthought* unity of the essential nature of metaphysics.[157]

But just as the patristic theologians, Greek and Latin, including Pseudo-Dionysius himself, did not remain silent about God in spite of the apophaticism that permeates their thought,[158] so Heidegger recognizes the open space for a discourse about God that will not be onto-theological. Speaking of "the possibility for Christian theology to take possession of Greek philosophy," Heidegger writes:[159]

> whether for better or for worse may be decided by the theologians on the basis of their experience of what is Christian, in pondering what is written in the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians ... "Has not God let the wisdom of this world become foolishness?" (I Corinthians 1:20) ... Will Christian theology one day resolve to take seriously the word of the apostle and thus also the conception of philosophy as foolishness?

Here our question about the Christian uses of secular postmodernism becomes the question: what Christian uses for Heidegger's Second Stage critique can be found for a theology that wants to opt out of the onto-theological project while still speaking of God. I speak of the Second Stage in order to note that the "step back" out of metaphysics (in Heidegger's sense

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[157] *Identity*, pp. 54-55.

[158] Pseudo-Dionysius turns from the silence of *The Mystical Theology* to speech in *The Divine Names*. It is the latter text on which Aquinas writes his commentary, and the fruit of his encounter with apophaticism is not silence but analogical predication, speech that knows its own inadequacy to its intended referent. St. Thomas is a Kantian when it comes to our knowledge of God. He knows that it is phenomenal, knowledge of God under the limiting conditions of the human capacity to receive, and not noumenal knowledge of God as God is *an sich*. See John Wippel, "Quidditative Knowledge of God" in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984)

[159] "Introduction", p. 288.

of the term) is not an abandonment of the notion that there is a Highest Being who is the key to the whole of being; and I speak of the onto-theological *project* to put the focus on philosophy's attempt to set the rules for our God talk in terms of its purpose. At issue is the "how" rather than the "what" of discourse. Thus, what is problematic about *causa sui* talk is not its content, for as the uncreated cause of all creation, the Christian God can rightly be designated as *causa sui*. The danger is that instead of being put to use in the service of wonder at the mystery of creation, praise and thanks for the gifts of creation, and responsible action in the service of creation, the causal language will be put to use for the purpose of rendering the whole of reality transparent to human under-standing, as if the human intellect were the measure of truth and the light in which beings finite and Infinite can fully show themselves.

This is already the first Christian use to which Heidegger's critique can be put: the preservation of mystery rather than its elimination. On this point Heidegger is a reminder of the overwhelming testimony of Christian tradition that God is incomprehensible, that God's being, wisdom, purposes, and love (which may not be as distinct as human language makes them seem) exceed our ability to grasp them, whether by nature or by grace, by reason or by revelation. A corollary of this lesson is that theology (both first and second order discourse about God) might well think of itself less as science and more as poetry (both lyric and narrative).

Here are a number of other lessons that Christian theology might learn from Heidegger, or, if you prefer, other Christian uses to which his critique can be put:

1) No philosophy, whether secular or religious, should be allowed to set the agenda and make the rules for Christian God talk, which rather should find its rules in its own sources and norms as found in Scripture in relation to tradition.[160] This does not mean that philosophy must be ignored, but that it is reduced to a maieutic role, helping theology to "recollect" what it already

[160] No attempt will be made here to address the question of the proper relation of tradition to Scripture.

knows on the basis of its own sources and in terms of its own norms. Secular philosophies (e.g. Lyotard and Heidegger) can play this role for theologies that are willing to listen to them carefully but unwilling to grant them the hegemony they often claim.

2) In the passage from I Corinthians cited by Heidegger, Paul identifies the source and norm of his theology as a logos that is foolishness in the eyes of the wisdom of the world, which he specifically links to the Greeks. Obviously it would be foolish on his part to subordinate his logos to that of Greek wisdom, especially when he identifies the former as the "word of the cross". The "step back" out of metaphysics will be a "step back" to a theology of the cross and away from every theology of glory.[161] On the epistemic side, this means the primacy of revelation over reason, for the cross is not something that can be "recollected" by any species of human reason. Thus Augustine finds much of value in the books of the Platonists, but does not find the Incarnation or the Atonement.[162] On the ethical side, this means the call to an *imitatio Christi* on the *via crucis* in sacrificial servanthood (Phil 2:5-8); nor is such an ethic "recollected" by any philosophy not under the tutelage of Scripture. In this context onto-theology would be a theology of glory that opens the door to glorying in the power of human reason to discover the truth and the power of human action to accomplish the good.

3) I have been using the terms 'theology', 'God talk', and 'discourse *about* God' more or less interchangeably. But first order God talk includes prayer, to which, on Heidegger's account, onto-theology fails to lead us; and prayer (along with other modes of worship) is not talking about God but talking to God. Moreover, prayer as talking to God does not originate with those who pray but is always a response to the God who has already spoken to us. First order discourse about God belongs to a language game (form of life)

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[161] Luther draws this distinction in his *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518, especially in sections 19-24. See *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), Vol. 31, pp. 52-55. For a brief analysis, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 25-34.

[162] *Confessions*, VII, 9, 20-21.

decisively shaped by listening to God and talking to God. The general principle to which Heidegger's critique directs our attention is that second order discourse about God needs to be in the service of first order discourse both to and about God on pain of being religiously otiose. The more specific principle, a corollary if you like, is that theology must lead from prayer to prayer. It must arise from a personal and communal life world saturated with prayer,[163] and it must lead back to prayer. It must, if it would overcome onto-theology, a) contribute toward overcoming the legitimation crisis of prayer by talking about God in such a way as to illuminate the necessity of talking to God, and b) contribute toward overcoming the motivation crisis of prayer by talking about God in such a way as to encourage and evoke prayer.

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These examples from Lyotard and Heidegger are but two of many ways that secular postmodern philosophy can be useful to Christian thought. I believe there are numerous other modes of postmodern philosophy that can have similar Christian uses, including Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian power/ knowledge genealogy. I leave these and other instances for the reader to work out, along with three reminders. First, finding such thinkers useful to Christian thought does not mean following them blindly or swallowing their thought uncritically. Neither in intention nor in result are they Christian thinkers. Second, the kind of appropriation I'm proposing is possible just to the degree that various postmodern critical analyses are conceptually separable from the secular, atheistic contexts in which they are to be found. Finally, I hope that by now it is clear the very thin soup one finds in Derrida's "religion without religion"[164] is not the only piety that one could call "postmodern". Rather, some postmodern critiques open the door for a kind of Christian thought that is robustly theistic and quite specifically Christian. No doubt such theology is not new but is to be found throughout the history of Christian thought, if never fully free from onto-theological tendencies. Perhaps one of the most important Christian uses to which secular postmodernism can be put is to help contemporary Christian thinkers

[163] *Confessions*, VII, 9, 20-21.

[164] See note 14 above.

sort of the wheat from the tares in our own traditions. The postmodern can lead back to the Premodern, or, more precisely, a critically appropriated postmodernism can lead to a critical re-appropriation of Premodern resources.

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STUDYING THE "OTHER," UNDERSTANDING THE "SELF": SCRIPTURE, REASON, AND THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAM-WEST ENCOUNTER

A conference was held at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut on April 2, 2005. The theme of the conference was ***"Studying the "Other," Understanding the "Self"— Scripture, Reason, and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter".*** The theme was selected with the intention of addressing a topic that has received a great deal of attention recently, the contemporary encounter between Islam and the West. This topic had been addressed at a wide variety of forums largely in response to current events and the "clash of civilization" thesis. Many of these discussions have made valuable contributions by challenging the "clash of civilization" thesis that posits that "Islam" and the "West" are two completely alien entities tragically destined to be at odds with each other into the indefinite future. In spite of these valuable contributions, a shortcoming could be noticed in the dynamics of the discourse. In almost all of these deliberations Muslim and non-Muslim/Western scholars engaged in discussions in which the "self" attempted to make itself better understood by directly communicating with the "other." Or alternately, Muslims and non-Muslims/Westerners studied the "other" in order to better understand the "other." The ethos shaping the conference held at Hartford Seminary in Hartford differed from these standard approaches on two counts. Firstly, it was consciously informed by the question: How can a critical but empathetic study of the alien "other" lead to a better understanding of the "self"? Secondly, it consciously considered Revealed Scripture, alongside the tools of critical academic inquiry, as a valid and valuable resource in the effort to address the issue at hand. In short this conference was a "scripturally reasoned" contribution to the discussion on the contemporary encounter between Islam and the West.

The format of the conference was the following. In the first session (April 2nd— Afternoon) Basit Koshul (Concordia College) presented a paper

arguing that an honest and candid understanding of the Muslim "self" in modern times will be enriched by a critical but empathetic study of the Western "other". This was followed by 3 responses of 25-30 minutes each, by Prof. Vincent Cornell, Yamine Mermer and Muhammad Suheyl Umar. In the second session (April 2nd— Evening) Prof. Steven Kepnes (Colgate University) presented a paper on the contribution that a study of the Muslim "other" can make to a better understanding of the modern Western "self". This was followed by 3 responses of 25-30 minutes each, by Nick Adams, Martin Kavka and Ian Markham. Sessions were m By Kelton Cobb, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Hartford Seminary. Detailed program and selected papers are given in the following pages. Here we present the rationale of the conference as articulated by its Convener, Dr. Basit Koshul.

Studying the "Other," Understanding the "Self"

Scripture, Reason, and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter

Statement of Problem: A thesis that has gained wide currency in recent years is that "Islam" and the "West" are two entities that are completely and fundamentally alien to each other— sharing no common roots and/or ideals whatsoever. If this thesis is indeed true, then perpetual conflict between the two alienated entities appears to be a given and a shared peaceful future between the two is logically ruled out. Since this thesis has gained wide currency in academic circles, it has invariably shaped the attitudes and policies of the "West" towards "Islam"— which in turn has shaped the attitude of "Islam" towards the "West." This has created the proverbial vicious circle of attitudes shaping reality, and reality affirming held attitudes. The viability of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence between "Islam" and the "West" in the global village requires a change in the attitude towards the alien other, taking into account the facts of history and empirical reality. It is obvious that the balance of power between "Islam" and the "West" in terms of the production of ideas and images is greatly skewed in favor of the "West." Consequently, both logic and ethics demand that the "West" invest more resources in the critical evaluation of a thesis that simultaneously posits, justifies and promotes irreconcilable and perpetual conflict between "Islam" and the "West."

The Conference: The conference held on Saturday, April 3rd consisted of two sessions. In the first sessions the a group of Muslim scholars discussed the necessity of Muslims studying modern Western philosophy, history and theology with a view to identifying the possible benefits of such study for enhancing modern Islam's self-understanding and capacity for self-expression. In the second session a group of non-Muslim scholars discussed the need for Westerners to study Islamic philosophy and intellectual history with a view to identifying the possible benefits of such study for enhancing the modern West's self-understanding and capacity for self-expression.

Rationale: There are a number of discussion groups engaged in interfaith and inter-civilizational dialogue. Many of these groups have made valuable contributions by challenging the thesis that "Islam" and the "West" are two completely alien entities tragically destined to be at odds with each into the indefinite future. This conference tried to build on the work that has already been done but, in addition, it was significantly different from the existing efforts. In almost all of the existing projects Muslim and non-Muslim scholars engage in discussion in which the "self" attempts to make itself better understood by directly communicating with the "other." Or alternately Muslims and non-Muslims study the "other" in order to better understand the "other." The ethos shaping the present project will differ from both of these standard approaches and be consciously informed by the question: How can a critical but empathetic study of the alien "other" lead to a better understanding of the alienated "self"? The presupposition implicit in this question is that the "self" can enhance the depth of its own self-understanding and capacity for self-expression if it is able to critically but empathetically dialogue with the alien "other." Just as significantly, scripture will be used as a tool, along with other tools of scholarly inquiry to guide, inform and sharpen the discussion of the topic at hand. Given the distinct character of the ethos informing this conference, it is reasonable to assume that such an event will offer new insights and open up new avenues of advancing the dialogue between "Islam" and the "West."

STUDYING THE "OTHER," UNDERSTANDING THE "SELF": SCRIPTURE, REASON, AND THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAM-WEST ENCOUNTER

Participant Bios

Session I: Studying the Western "Other" ***Understanding the Islamic "Self"***

Presenter:

Basit Koshul

Assistant Professor, Religion Department, Concordia College

Education: PhD (2003) Drew University in Sociology of Religion, PhD (ABD) University of Virginia, Religious Studies

Area of Specialty and Interests: Sociology of religion, philosophy of religion and science, Islam and the modern world.

Publications and Related Activity: Koshul has published a number of articles in scholarly journals in the area of Islamic Studies, the most recent being "Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd and Islam's Sojourn into Modernity: A Comparative Study" in *Islamic Studies* (43/2). Palgrave Macmillan has recently published his revised dissertation for his first PhD titled *The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber's Legacy*. He is currently working on two projects: a) a comparative study of Weber's methodology of scientific inquiry and CS Peirce's philosophy of science and b) a comparative study of Muhammad Iqbal's and CS Peirce's philosophy of religion (in collaboration with Richard Gilmore of the Philosophy Department at Concordia College.)

Respondents:

Vincent Cornell

Professor of History and Director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Arkansas

Education: PhD (1989) UCLA in Islamic Studies

Specialties and Interests: Islamic history, theology, law

Publications and Related Activity: A partial list of Cornell's publications includes a number of articles in scholarly journals and groundbreaking studies in two different areas: a) a study of Moroccan Sufism titled *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* and b) an original study of a leading figure in Maghribi Sufism titled *The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al- Ansari.* His most recent publications are on Islamic theology and philosophy ("Religion and Philosophy" chapter for *World Eras* Volume 2: *The Rise and Spread of Islam 622-1500*, Susan L. Douglass, ed.), and the challenges of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to the Muslim world ("A Muslim to Muslims: Reflections After September 11," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101:2, Spring 2002). He has also authored *The Book of the Glory of the Black Race: al-Jahiz's Kitab Fakhr as-Sudan 'ala al-Bidan.*

Yamine Mermer

Education: PhD, Durham University in Theoretical Physics, PhD (Candidate) Religious Studies, Indiana University

Area of Specialty and Interests: Philosophy of science, hermeneutics, theory of meaning, and ethics especially with respect to the thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

Publications and Related Activity: Mermer has authored one book, *Bilimin Marifetullah Boyutlarý* (Transcendental Dimensions of Science, co-authored two, *Risale-i Nur'dan Bir Toplumsal Baris Onerisi* (Towards Peace: A

Proposal from the Risale-i Nur) and *Bilimin Oteki Yuzu* (Beyond Science) and translated two others from Turkish into French; *Nature: Cause ou Effet* by Said Nursi, *Les Deux Voies pour L'Homme* by Said Nursi. She 2 of 3 has also presented papers at international symposia, a number of which have been published as chapters in the symposia proceedings.

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

Director, Iqbal Academy Pakistan

Education: MA (1979) English, M Phil (1994) Iqbal studies, AIOU, PhD (ABD), Punjab University Lahore in Philosophy, Training in traditional Islamic Sciences (Arabic, Persian, Tajwid and Hifz)

Area of Specialty and Interests: Sufism as well as in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal and in the intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent from Shah Waliullah to Iqbal.

Publications and Related Activity: Umar is the Founder-Editor of *Riwayat*, a scholarly Urdu journal; Editor, *Iqbal Review*, a quarterly journal, published alternately in Urdu and English, focusing on Iqbal studies in addition to Islamic Studies, Comparative Religion, Philosophy, Literature, History, Arts and Sociology. He also planned and inaugurated the Persian, Arabic and Turkish versions of *Iqbal Review*. He also edited *Studies in Tradition,* a quarterly journal devoted to traditional studies on Metaphysics, Philosophy, Literature, Art and Science. Well versed in Urdu, English, Arabic, and Persian, he has contributed a number of articles on Islamic and literary themes to reputed academic journals apart from publishing works in English, Urdu and Persian on Iqbal, Islamic Studies, literature and Sufism.

Session II: Studying the Islamic "Other" ***Understanding the Western "Self"***

Presenter:

Steve Kepnes

Murray W. and Mildred K. Finard Professor in Jewish Studies, Colgate University

Education: MA (1976), PhD (1983) University of Chicago

Area of Specialty and Interests: Judaism, holocaust and genocide studies, contemporary Israel, Ethics in Judaism and relations between Jewish ethics and contemporary ethical theory ***Publications and Related Activity:*** *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*, with Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs (Westview Press, 1997); Editor, *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York University Press, 1996); *The Text as Thou* (Indiana University Press, 1992); *The Challenge of Psychology to Faith*, co-editor (NY: Seabury, 1982); articles in *The Harvard Theological Review*, *Judaism, Journal of Jewish Studies*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Fellow, Hebrew University and Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Israel 1993-95; editor, Judaism section, *Religious Studies Review*; co-editor, *Journal of Textual Reasoning*.

Respondents:

Nick Adams

Lecturer, Christian Systematic Theology and Philosophical Theology, University of Edinburgh

Education: PhD University of Cambridge in Theology

Area of Specialty and Interests: German Idealism (Kant to Hegel) and its critics: its influence on Christian theology in the twentieth century and beyond.

Publications: Nick has written on figures in the Christian theological tradition that have been influenced by German Idealism, e.g. Schleiermacher, Rahner, Pannenberg, Moltmann. He has recently completed a monograph on theological themes in the work of the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, and is currently working on an introductory book for theologians on the meanings of 'God' in German Idealism. This is intended to persuade theological students to study the debates begun in this often-misunderstood

period and continued in the present. He has also written on the relationship between tradition and rationality.

Martin Kavka

Assistant Professor of Religion, Florida State University

Education: PhD (2000) Rice University

Specialties and Interest: Modern European and American Jewish thought, post-Holocaust thought, and postmodern philosophy of religion.

Publications and Related Activity: His first book, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy*, was recently published with Cambridge University Press. In addition to publishing a number of articles in scholarly journals Kavka is currently working on preparing *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: The Modern Era* (co-edited with David Novak, planned publication 2008). He is also working on two long-term projects that reflect his interests in post-Holocaust thought and the post-modern philosophy of religion. The first, tentatively titled *Redemption Now! The Metaphysics of Presence in Halakha*, analyzes a group of Jewish philosophical and theological texts that claim that the world-to-come can be accessed in the present moment through performing divinely commanded acts. The second, tentatively titled *The Perils of Covenant*, will argue that the recent trend in liberal Jewish theology to conflate the secular and sacred realms leads to a comprehensive liberalism (to use John Rawls' phrase) that risks being both politically obsolete and religiously fanatical; the conclusion of this book will begin the work of grounding a political liberalism out of traditional Jewish sources.

Ian Markham

Professor of Theology and Ethics, Dean of Hartford Seminary

Education: M Litt, University of Cambridge,

PhD University of Exeter

Area of Specialty and Interests: Philosophical Theology, Christian Ethics, Christianity and Other Religions

Publications and Related Activity: Markham's current writing project is titled, 'An Open Orthodoxy'. It will be a substantial study of the ways in which the Christian tradition has been shaped by non-Christian sources and traditions. A partial list of his publications includes three books*, Plurality and Christian Ethics*, *Truth and the Reality of God* and *A Theology of Engagement*, three co-authored books on practical theology, two textbooks and a number of articles in scholarly and popular periodicals. Speaking of the approach shaping his scholarship, Markham notes: "We live in an odd world: conservative Christians largely use the term orthodox. Yet the truth about the religious tradition we have inherited is that it is dynamic, open, and interactive. True fidelity to our tradition requires an openness and willingness to learn from others. My commitment to interfaith dialogue is not a betrayal or compromise of my tradition.

Sessions Moderated By Kelton Cobb

Professor of Theology and Ethics, Hartford Seminary

Education: MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary

PhD, University of Iowa

Area of Specialty and Interests: Systematic Theology, Theology of Culture, Theological Ethics

Publications and Related Activity: Cobb joined the faculty of Hartford Seminary in 1995, and teaches courses in theology and ethics. He has a keen interest in the overlap of these two disciplines, understanding that a theology gives rise to moral actions, and that moral actions assume a theology. He has authored the *Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, two papers published as chapters in books and a number of articles in scholarly journals. His current interest is in reading theologians who lived and wrote during periods of history that

we now recognize, retrospectively, as "hinge" periods for western civilization -- theologians like Augustine, Dante, Calvin, Bartolome de las Casas, Pope Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper. Each of them made a serious attempt to reflect on the changes going on around them in light of their theological convictions. The influence of their writings on the unfolding social theory of the west has been largely neglected, but with many recognizing that we are again in a hinge period of our history, there is a small renaissance of attention to these theologians.

STUDYING THE WESTERN OTHER, UNDERSTANDING THE ISLAMIC SELF: A QUR'ANICALLY REASONED PERSPECTIVE

Basit Bilal Koshul

The fact that Islam is facing a particularly difficult challenge in its socio-cultural encounter with the modern West is attentively detailed by Murad in his essay titled "Faith in the Future: Islam After the Enlightenment".[165] In the beginning of the essay he cites the late right-wing Dutch politician Prim Fortuyn as pointing to the root cause of the impasse. Fortuyn said: "Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam".[166] Foruyn's position requires contemporary Islam to pass through the Enlightenment in order for it to become a part of the modern world. In reaction to this diatribe from the right in Western Europe, certain quarters in the Muslim world assert that Islam must resist any and all constructive engagement with the Enlightenment tradition. The former position sees nothing good in Islam and requires a complete embrace of the Enlightenment while the latter position sees nothing good in the Enlightenment and advocates an assertion of Islamic ideals in the face of encroaching modernity. Both of these positions fail to note that the post-Nietzschean critique of the Enlightenment has laid bare the fact that there is no such thing as Enlightenment orthodoxy. A careful review of the Enlightenment tradition reveals that it is composed of differing (and very often competing) voices, ideas and trends. This postmodern "discovery" brings with it the possibility of a more nuanced (and perhaps more fruitful) way of discussing the possibilities and dynamics of Islam's encounter with the modern West. While some elements in the Enlightenment are clearly repugnant to Islamic (and other religious) ideals other elements show remarkable convergence with Islamic ideals and

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[165] Murad, A. (2002) "Faith in the Future: Islam After the Enlightenment" at http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/postEnlight.htm. 8.

[166] Cited by Murad, 3.

teachings. Given the multiform character of the Enlightenment, a more adequate way of discussing Islam's encounter with Enlightenment modernity would be to identify those elements that are antithetical to Islamic teachings and propose a meaningful way of responding to the difficulties and challenges that they pose. Given the multiform character of the Enlightenment, this critical engagement with Enlightenment modernity has to be complemented with constructive engagement. The constructive engagement for its part will have to go beyond merely providing a list of the positive attributes of the Enlightenment and identify possibility and parameters of their affirmation from an Islamic perspective. I will first present a reasoned argument outlining the possibility (and necessity) of such a mode of engagement between Islam and the modern West. Then I will turn to the Qur'an and demonstrate how this "reasoned" argument is rooted in the Qur'anic narrative. I hope to offer a Qur'anically reasoned argument that not only makes it possible to "understand the 'self' by studying the 'other'" but almost seems to predicate the very possibility of self-knowledge on a critical but empathetic understanding of the "alien" other.

At the risk of sounding pedantic I must offer a disclaimer at the very beginning of this discussion. Terms such as "Islam", "modern West", "Enlightenment", "modernity" etc. will be used quite often in the following pages. I am conscious of the fact that the reality that these terms refer to is far more varied (actually infinitely more varied) than my presentation suggests. That much having been said, I feel justified in using these terms in the manner that I do because I use them in a manner that is "objectively possible" and has proven to be so by numerous other investigations. These terms are "ideal types" in a strictly Weberian sense— concepts that have been abstracted from empirical reality in order to facilitate the conceptual mastery of that reality for the purpose of understanding (and eventually remedying) a cultural condition that the investigator finds to be deleterious.

Squaring the Circle: Islam and the Enlightenment Challenge

Murad notes that theology is "all about the successful squaring of circles"[167]— talking about the infinite mystery of God in finite human terms,

[167] Murad, 1.

asserting that in spite of appearances to the contrary God is as absolutely just as He is omnipotent, and asserting that the most valuable of knowledge is to be had by means that are as palpable as they are inexplicable. But the squaring of circles is not limited to spiritual concerns— it has socio-cultural implications as well. The particular character of Islamic monotheism leads to a universalism in which a particular religious tradition (i.e. Islam) seeks to integrate itself into and enrich cultures other than the one into which it was born. And the historical record indicates that Islam has been largely successful in this endeavour:

> Despite its Arabian origins, Islam is to be not merely *for* the nations, but *of* the nations. No pre-modern civilization embraced more cultures than that of Islam…The many-coloured fabric of the traditional *Umma* is not merely part of the glory of the Blessed Prophet, of whom it is said: "Truly your adversary is the one cut off" (108:3). It also demonstrates the divine purpose that this Ishmaelite covenant is to bring a monotheism that uplifts, rather than devastates cultures.[168]

This record of historical success makes the tensions characterizing Islam's encounter with modern Western culture that much more puzzling. For Murad the conflictual state of affairs between Islam and the modern West gives rise to the most serious of all questions: "[I]s the engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles cannot manage?".[169] The answer given by ideologues, demagogues and zealots on both sides of the Islam-West divide is a resounding "NO!"

Murad argues that this negative response can be and should be challenged. He posits that turning to a spiritual form of Islam, as represented by Sufism, opens up the possibility of "a form of religion that elegantly and persuasively squares the circles" in the contemporary encounter between Islam and the West. This is an alternative to a "purely non-spiritual reading of Islam, lacking the vertical dimension [that] tends to produce only liberals or zealots;

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[168] Ibid, 2.
[169] Ibid.

and both have proved irrelevant to our needs".[170] In contrast to blindness characterizing the fanatics and the slavishness of the liberals:

> A more sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world.[171]

It is difficult to argue with Murad's conclusion that the successful squaring of the circle in the contemporary setting requires that the dissenting voice be located within modernity. But in order to do this adequately the difficulties and challenges inherent in such an undertaking need to be understood clearly. A close look at the defining characteristics of modern Western thought reveals the extreme difficulty of being a dissenting voice within the this tradition from the perspective of traditional religion and classical philosophy. It is well known that concern with wisdom, illumination and the Divine is at the heart of all pre-modern religious traditions. Recent studies of classical philosophy have shown that this also the case with the philosophical tradition. For example, Pierre Hadot notes that in spite of many differences regarding the particulars, all schools of classical Greek philosophy viewed the study of philosophy as a an "*askesis*" or philosophical exercises "linked to the custom of spiritual instruction".[172] The ultimate goal of these exercises was "to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them".[173] Furthermore, philosophy as a means of "attaining wisdom" was seen as being inseparable from the choice of a particular way of life,

> [w]hether it is the choice of the good, as in Plato; or the choice of pleasure, as for the Epicureans; or the choice of moral intent, as for the Stoics; or the choice of life in accordance with the Intellect, in the case of Aristotle and Plotinus…[174]

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[170] Ibid, 9.
[171] Ibid, 8.
[172] Hadot, P. (2002*) What is Ancient Philosophy?* Translated by Michael Chase. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press. 188.
[173] Ibid, 6.
[174] Ibid, 175.

In agreement with traditional religion, classical philosophy viewed human reason as one means among others in the pursuit of the ultimate goal (i.e. wisdom, illumination or the Divine). Additionally, both traditional religion and classical philosophy saw ethical praxis as an indispensable element in the exercise and disciplining of reason. In short the pre-modern religious and philosophical tradition sees the human mind as a finite and limited entity that needs the aid of external resources if it is to fulfill its function adequately. But Enlightenment philosophy categorically rejects the limited and relational character of the human mind/reason. Murad notes:

> The Enlightenment,…, as Descartes foresaw, would propose that the mind is already self-sufficient and that moral and spiritual growth are not preconditions for intellectual eminence…Not only is the precondition of the transformation of the subject repudiated, but the classical idea, shared by the religions and the Greeks, that access to truth itself brings about a personal transformation, is dethroned just as insistently.[175]

The repudiation of classical philosophy and traditional religion by Enlightenment thought has far reaching implications regarding the possibility of a meaningful "prophetic dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world". The possibility of such a voice requires that the critiquing, dissenting witness and the critiqued modern world share some common ground. In the absence of some common ground relating the critic to the critiqued there cannot be any critique from within, only (zealous) condemnation from without, or the obsequious surrender of the outsider. But Enlightenment philosophy categorically rejects all philosophical and religious notions of wisdom, illumination and the Divine. From the Enlightenment perspective all talk about these "spiritual realities" is either irrational nonsense or a hermeneutical mask concealing economic interests, the will to power or libidinal desires. Because of the Enlightenment's notion of self-sufficient reason as the ultimate arbiter between doubt and certainty, the crucial question that any religious or philosophical voice aspiring to be a dissenting voice within modernity has to face is: Where is the common ground that I share with Enlightenment thought that allows for a meaningful exchange?

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[175] Murad, 9.

In addition to the aforementioned difficulty that faces all religious and philosophical traditions, Enlightenment philosophy offers Islam a particularly acute challenge. In the well known Hadith i Gibreel, the salient features of *Iman*, *Islam* and *Ihsan* are described in detail by the Blessed Prophet— and it is implied that faith, peace/surrender and grace/plentitude are the natural order of things. If we take Descartes, Hobbes and Malthus as representative thinkers of the Enlightenment paradigm we can say that doubt, brutishness and scarcity/selfishness characterize the state of nature.[176] To the degree that Cartesian doubt, Hobesian brutishness and Malthusian calculations are part of the ethos that shaped (and is shaping) the modern West, it becomes that much more difficult to envision Islam playing the role of a "dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world". While other religious traditions are challenged by the Enlightenment paradigm, none is challenged more directly and acutely than Islam given the centrality of faith (*iman*), peace/surrender (*islam*) and grace/plentitude (*ihsan*) in the Islamic theological and socio-cultural vision.

Any attempt to square the circle in the modern setting requires a candid acknowledgement of the unique characteristics of the Enlightenment paradigm that has given birth to the modern reality. Because of the Enlightenment's rejection of the traditional religious/philosophical understanding of wisdom, illumination and the Divine human reason/mind are left as the only shared ground on which the dissenting voice and the dominant paradigm can relate to each other. Consequently, if the squaring of the circle is to be done as a dissenting voice from within the modern world then the following conditions will have to be met: a) human mind/reason be the court of appeal for all critique/complaints and b) human mind/reason be the foundation on which all principles are affirmed/stand. In other words reason and rationality have to be the starting point of both the critique of the Enlightenment paradigm and the affirmation of any (Islamic) alternative. In sum in order for Islam to be a dissenting voice from within the modern world, the squaring the circle means pursuing the twin tasks of critique of the

[176] It is obviously the case that the Enlightenment paradigm does not define the modern West in its totality, and it is equally obviously the case Descartes, Hobbes and Malthus do not exhaust the possibilities of Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment thought and the ideas of these thinkers are cited here only to bring into sharp relief the uniquely modern character of the problematic that Islam must face (and face up to) in its attempt to square the circle.

Enlightenment paradigm and affirmation of the Islamic alternative "within the limits of reason alone".[177] While this task seems quite daunting one can scarcely imagine the implications for contemporary Islam's self-understanding if an affirmation of *iman*, *islam* and *ihsan* (if not *Iman*, *Islam* and *Ihsan*) can be accomplished "within the limits of reason alone". This apparent capitulation to the Enlightenment paradigm should not in any way be taken to mean that revelation and tradition have no role to play in Islam's contemporary encounter with the modern West (the next two section will detail the role of revelation and tradition in this regard). But it should be understood that since any appeal to "spiritual realities," religion and tradition place the dissenting voice outside the reality of the modern world, then such appeals are not directly relevant to Islam's contemporary attempt to square the circle.

Circling the Square: Islam and the Enlightenment Promise

If Islam has been supremely successful at squaring the circles in the past it is not just because it has had the ability to be a dissenting voice within a particular socio-cultural reality. Just as importantly, perhaps more importantly, Islam has been able to affirm the validity and authenticity of the deepest aspirations and yearnings of numerous non-Arab cultural configurations— and offer the resource of the Qur'anic narrative in which these aspirations and yearnings can be expressed (augmenting and enriching the pre-existing expressions). This dual role of dissent and affirmation is in keeping with a holistic vision of the prophetic witness. Robert Ellwood notes that the apostle (or prophetic witness in our terms) is not merely a dissenting critic but also (and maybe more importantly) an affirming advocate. For Ellwood, the prophetic witness becomes a "spokesperson for an existing, but perhaps uncrystallized and emergent"[178] spiritual and ethical agenda that was already present in society. It is the task (and genius) of the prophetic witness to adapt and reconfigure these pre-existing (positive) trends in society, distinguish them from the established (negative) trends and attitudes inhibiting their emergence and affirm the positive trends from the

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[177] This phrase is used with due acknowledgment (and apologies) to Kant.

[178] Ellwood, R. (2003) *Cycles of Faith: The Development of the World's Religions*. California: Altamira Press. 85.

perspective of his ministry. In other words, the prophetic witness offers a revelatory affirmation of some of the real but dormant aspirations and potentialities at the very heart of its socio-cultural environment, whose emergence and maturation is being forestalled by neglect and forgetfulness. In short, in addition to striving to be a dissenting witness from within an established order, the prophetic witness also strives to be an affirming voice from outside of that order— with the revealed word providing the grounds of affirmation.[179] Consequently, in order for the task of squaring the circle to be a meaningful exercise in Islam's contemporary encounter with the modern West, there has to be an Islamic affirmation of some of the deepest aspirations that are at the heart of the Enlightenment project.

The task of affirmation in the contemporary meeting of Islam with the modern world, pre-supposes that there is something worthy of affirmation. This for its part requires an identification of the affirmative side of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is not merely a negative program that rejects the reality of wisdom, illumination and the Divine, it is also a positive program that affirms the ideals of individualism, universalism and materialism. Expressing these Enlightenment ideals in their non-reified form, it can be said that the Enlightenment ideals affirm the irreducible dignity of the individual human being, the equality of all human beings before the law and the value/worth of the material and profane worlds. In conjunction with other ideas and in tension with still some others, these three ideals have shaped the social, political and educational institutions of the modern West. Speaking in the most general terms, it can be said that modern civil law, the modern political state and the modern secular academy/university represent the institutionalization of these ideals. While the depth and breath of institutionalization of these ideals has varied greatly in different Western societies, the past 3-4 centuries of Western history show an inexorable movement in this direction. An argument could be made (and has been made) that the United States has institutionalized Enlightenment ideals with a greater consistency and breadth than any other Western country. The

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[179] Mohammed Bamyeh has authored a recent study detailing the fact that the Blessed Prophet simultaneously built upon and critiqued/dismantled existing ideas and structures from the pre-Islamic era. See Mohammed A. Bamyeh *The Social Origins of Islam: Mind, Economy, Discourse*. Minnesota, London: University of Minnesota Press. 1999.

evidence in favor of this contention is not insignificant. What cannot be contested is the fact that the modern West's institutions, self-understanding and historical development are all inextricably tied to these three ideals. The Enlightenment break with traditional religion[180] is as much tied to the affirmation of individualism, universalism and materialism as to the rejection of the notions of wisdom, illumination and the Divine. In short, the institutionalization of these three ideals represent those positive affirmations that set Enlightenment thought apart from traditional religion.

This Enlightenment affirmation provides the opportunity for the monotheistic religious traditions to engage with the Enlightenment tradition on a positive note. Beginning with Max Weber[181] in the early part of the 20th century, a body of literature has been steadily accumulating demonstrating that critical Enlightenment ideas and ideals cannot be understood in isolation from the sublimation of a particular religious impulse. Alasdair McIntyre,[182] Peter Berger,[183] John Milbank,[184] and Rodney Stark[185] (among others) have further detailed the intimate link between religious ideals and the birth of modern West. The sociologists in this list have gone so far as to suggest that secularization of human culture becomes an historical possibility only with the emergence of monotheism and that the modern, secular West is the product of a particularly monotheistic religious development. To the degree that the analysis linking monotheism with modernity is correct, it provides

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[180] I do not mention classical philosophy at this point because Enlightenment self-understanding posits a continuation with and fulfillment of the classical philosophical tradition. While there is scholarly research that shows Enlightenment philosophy to be a break from classical philosophy in its rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine (i.e. Hadot), I am not aware of a similar argument showing that the Enlightenment understanding of individualism, universalism and materialism is also a departure from classical philosophy.

[181] See Max Weber (2002) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Press.

[182] See Alisdair MacIntyre (1984) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Univ. Press.

[183] See Peter Berger (1967) *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

[184] See John Milbank (1998) *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford and Massachusettes: Doubleday.

[185] See Rodney Stark (2001) *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

the traditional monotheistic religions with the opportunity to consider the Enlightenment as a post-traditional expression of monotheistic ideals. From the Islamic perspective the Enlightenment can be seen as a post-Qur'anic monotheistic tradition— in a very limited, particular (but not insignificant) sense. But in addition to this opportunity that Islam shares with other monotheistic traditions for positively engaging with the Enlightenment, it is distinctively positioned to affirm key Enlightenment ideals in a way that other religious traditions can't. The Enlightenment affirmation of the dignity of the individual, equality before the law and the value of the material/profane world provides Islam with a unique opportunity to be an affirming witness from outside the modern world. It can be stated with confidence that Islam can affirm the three aforementioned Enlightenment ideals (in their non-reified form) with a greater degree of consistency and insistency than any other religious tradition. The fact that the Qur'an is a revealed book by which the Divine instructed humanity in the ways of knowledge, wisdom, etc. locates Islam in the pre-modern historical period. Consequently, the Qur'anic event places Islam outside the modern world in a very particular and limited (but by no means insignificant) sense.

The Hajj is the one ritual in Islam that expresses the affirmation of the aforementioned ideals most comprehensively and the "circling of the square" (the *tawaf* around the Ka'aba) is among the most important rituals of the Hajj. This annual circling of the square is the Islamic affirmation of the irreducible dignity of the individual, the equality of all human beings before the law and the spiritual value of the material world and profane acts. During the Hajj all pilgrims perform the same rites, in the exact same way and in the exact same sanctuary. Furthermore, every act that the pilgrim performs, from eating and getting a haircut to circling the Ka'aba and standing at the plain of Arafat, is a consecrating act. There is no culminating event where a particular individual, from a particular tribe, goes into a particular part of the sanctuary to perform particular rituals that signal the culmination of communion between the human and the Divine. Similarly there is no particular caste whose members perform particular rituals to symbolize the human participation in the life of the Divine.

The rituals during the Hajj are a more intense expression of Islam's claim that all human beings in the post-Prophetic period are equally capable of

becoming priests— individuals whose actions can transform the profane into the sacred and who can participate in the life of the Divine. There is no liturgy or consecrating ritual that is the exclusive privilege/domain of a group of people set apart from (or above) the rest of the community— all liturgy and all consecrating rituals are the collective heritage of the Ummah. Furthermore, there is no worldly act or material object that is not potentially sacred— all that is needed is for a believer to invoke the Word of God (in the tradition of the Blessed Prophet) to consecrate the object/act. In other words, potentially every human being is a Levite/Brahman, every place in the world the Holy Land and every worldly act (or material thing) a sacrament. From the Islamic perspective any act done by any human being at any time can be a means of communion/participation in the Divine life. For Muhammad Iqbal, this is the profound cultural and philosophic significance of the doctrine of the finality of Prophethood:

> The [Blessed] Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation [the Qur'an] is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam…is the birth of the inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must be finally thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an, and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality.[186]

Consequently, it is stating the obvious that there are strong elective affinities between the Qur'anic notion of the human being as an individual, humanity on a universal level and the material/profane worlds and the

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[186] Iqbal, M. (1999) *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore, Pakistan: Institute of Islamic Culture. 100ff.

Enlightenment ideals of individualism, universalism and materialism.[187] The research of George Makdisi[188] on the rise of colleges, Marcel Boisard[189] on

[187] In the previous section the examples of Descartes, Hobbes and Malthus were isolated from the Enlightenment tradition in order to highlight and sharpen the distinction between Islam and Enlightenment thought. Here three particular ideals are isolated in order to highlight the commonality. On both occasion the writer is well aware of the fact that countervailing arguments could be made – as a matter of fact he himself offers a countervailing argument in the present section to the argument made in the previous section (i.e. showing strong elective affinities between Islam and the Enlightenment ideals.) In the present case it could be argued that the guillotine in revolutionary France and the gas chambers in Nazi Germany are as much an expression of Enlightenment ideals as the three ideals that have been mentioned. Astute thinkers since the very birth of the Enlightenment have warned of the "dark" side of the Enlightenment – Pascal, Blake, Goethe, Rousseau – long before world wars, death camps, total war, mutually assured destruction etc. In more recent times, Weber (1978) [*Economy and Society*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press. Vol. 2.] is probably alluding to the role of guillotine in revolutionary France when he comments: "This charismatic glorification of 'Reason,' which found a characteristic expression in its apotheosis by Robespierre…" (p.1209). Richard Rubenstein (1987) takes Weber's analysis of bureaucracy and technology further and analyzes the Nazi Holocaust in its light in *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future*. New York: Harper Torchbooks. He argues that:

The Holocaust was an expression of some of the most significant political, moral, religious and demographic tendencies of Western civilization in the twentieth century. The Holocaust cannot be divorced from the very same culture of modernity that produced the two world wars and Hitler (p. 6, emphasis in original).

And a little bit later:

One of the least helpful ways of understanding the Holocaust is to regard the destruction process as the work of a small group of irresponsible criminals who were atypical of normal statesmen and who somehow gained control of the German people, forcing them by terror and the deliberate stimulation of religious and ethnic hatred to pursue a barbaric and retrograde policy that was thoroughly at odds with the great traditions of Western civilization.

On the contrary*, we are more likely to understand the Holocaust if we regard it as the expression of some of the most profound tendencies of Western civilization in the twentieth century* (p. 21, emphasis in original).

Consequently, when Muslims point to the dark side of the Enlightenment they add nothing new to the discussion. The point of the present discussion is not to offer a value-judgment based on comparing and contrasting the "bright" side of the Enlightenment with its "dark" side. The goal is to identify the particular points on and the particular conditions under which Islam (in contrast to other religious traditions) can make a (uniquely?) positive contribution to the modern world, and also benefit from what the modern world has to offer. In the context of the circling of the square, the following observations by Iqbal are very much on the mark:

Humanity needs three thing to-day – a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and the basic principle of a universal import directing the evolution of society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe has, no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men, while religion has always elevated individuals, and transformed whole societies. The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement. The Muslim, on the other hand, is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality…and in view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Iqbal in *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (p. 142).

The fact that the Enlightenment ideals (i.e. the "bright" side of the Enlightenment) is currently under siege is obvious – and it is under siege from precisely the "dark" side of the Enlightenment. In its current predicament it is difficult to see how the humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment can survive the assault from the unrestrained quest for economic profit, technological domination and manipulation of the environment and bureaucratic efficiency. This is what Rubenstein wrote in the concluding paragraph of his book after acknowledging that the book was the "result of one political conservative's attempt to reassess his views on politics and society in the aftermath of Watergate and the Nixon presidency" (p. 95):

Much of this book has dealt with the fate of those who were rendered politically or economically redundant in earlier decades of this century. Their story is one of the most terrible in the annals of the race. In a time of diminishing affluence and increasing mass unemployment, their story carries a warning concerning our own future. The history of the twentieth century has taught us that people who are rendered permanently superfluous are eventually condemned to segregated precincts of the living dead or are exterminated outright. No genuine conservative could possibly defend policies or institutions that condemn an ever-multiplying number of people to such a fate. Such policies are recipes for unmitigated disaster. Before it is too late – and the hour is very late indeed – conservatives must distinguish themselves from defenders of selfish, anti-social privilege (pp. 96ff.)

Given the predicament of Enlightenment ideals, Islam is afforded with a unique historical opportunity to render a most meaningful service to modern humanity. If it is the case that the modern Muslim can affirm the ideals of human dignity, universal equality before the law and the value of the material/profane on the basis of revelation then Islam can provide a supra-rational affirmation of these ideals and inject fresh life and vigor into them. In return the Muslim would be in a position to move out his/her own state of spiritual stupor and lethargy.

[188] See, George Makdisi (1981) *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Higher Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. See also, his equally impressive work (1990)

the rise of humanism and Richard Bulliet[190] on the rise of modern culture in the modern West (among others) suggests that there is causal link between the Islamic affirmation of these ideals and the emergence of these ideals in post-Rennaisance Europe. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to delve into this issue in detail, but a growing body of research suggests that the aforementioned elective affinities are not mere theoretical possibilities, but historical realities— thereby providing the historical grounds on which future possibilities can be constructed. In short, Islamic ideals and teaching as well as modern scholarship on the historical exchange of ideas between Islam and the West suggest that the circling the square (i.e. the Islamic affirmation of modern Western ideals from outside of the modern world) is a real possibility.

The fact that Islam contains the resources to be an affirming witness from outside the modern world is a very attractive possibility for the present and the future. But at the same time it raises a very troubling question about the past. If it is indeed the case that Islam affirms the irreducible dignity of the individual, equality of all before the law and the inherent goodness of the material/profane worlds then the question emerges: Why is it that the modern, secular West has succeeded in institutionalizing these ideals with a degree of consistency than traditional Muslim society? The posing of this question and an honest facing up to it opens up the possibility of contemporary Islam gaining a better understanding of the historical development of which it is a product.

Robert Bellah[191] and Ernest Gellner[192] are two social scientists puzzled by the friction characterizing Islam's encounter with the modern world,

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titled *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West: With Special Reference to Scholasticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

189 See the "Introduction" in Marcel Boisard (1988) *Humanism in Islam*. Indiana: American Trust Publications.

190 See, Richard Bulliet (2004) *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press.

191 See, Bellah, R. (1991) "Islamic Tradition and Problems of Modernization" in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*. California: University of California Press. 146-167.

192 See. Gellner, E. (1992) *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London, New York: Routledge.

precisely because they see the Qur'anic event anticipating certain "modern" ideals, being open to them and affirming them. Gellner goes so far as to note that Islam appears to be better suited than any other pre-modern religious tradition to integrate itself into the modern world while maintaining the integrity of its foundational principles. They note that certain historical and institutional developments in traditional Islamic culture short-circuited the process of the complete rationalization and integration of the aforementioned ideals into the relevant institutions. Observations such as these suggest that while there are resources in the Islamic tradition that are indispensable for coming to terms with the modern world, there are also hindrances (both intellectual and institutional) that must be overcome. In other words, if the circling of the square is to be done in an honest and consistent manner then the affirmation of modern Western ideals from outside of the modern world must be complemented by a critical stance towards developments in Islamic history based on the same criteria (i.e. the Qur'anic event). This means that the circling of the square requires a rejection of the uncritical affirmation of tradition (or a particular school within tradition) just as the squaring of the circle requires a rejection of the blind negation of tradition by the zealots and the liberals.

Squaring the Circle, Circling the Square— the Qur'anic Warrant

The argument in the previous two sections can be summarized thus. Islam can gain valuable insights into its own inner ethos, historical development and latent potentialities by critically but constructively engaging with the modern West. This engagement has two aspects and both aspects are characterized by simultaneous affirmation and criticism— in the first part this is done "within the limits of reason alone" and in the second part it is done from the perspective of the Qur'anic event.

Squaring the Circle: Islam plays the role of a prophetic dissenting witness from within the modern world— which means:

1. a reasoned/rational critique of the Enlightenment rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine and
2. a reasoned/rational affirmation the Islamic ideals of *iman*, *islam* and *ihsan*

Circling the Square: Islam plays the role of a prophetic affirming witness from outside the modern world— which means:

1. the Qur'anic affirmation of the Enlightenment ideals of human dignity, human equality and the value of the profane/material
2. the Qur'anic critique of Islamic tradition for its failure to fully express key Islamic ideals in institutional form.

Having looked at the reasoned grounds on which this approach is built the discussion now turns to the scriptural grounds. In this section I offer the Qur'anic treatment of Judaism and Christianity as informing the rationale underpinning the squaring the circle approach and the Qur'anic treatment of the Fall from Eden (as interpreted by Muhammad Iqbal) as informing the rationale underpinning the circling the square approach.

In its engagement with Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an turns to the Bible at critical points in the discussion. On the one hand the Qur'an affirms the validity of the Biblical narrative in very strong terms, thereby establishing it as the common ground on which it can interact with (and affirm portions of) the Jewish and Christian traditions. On the other hand the Qur'an critiques particular beliefs and practices in the Jewish and Christian tradition precisely because they do not find any warrant in the Biblical narrative. The Qur'an's employment of the Biblical narrative does not end here, it goes (much?) further. The Qur'an goes on to assert that the Bible bears testimony to the verity of the Blessed Prophet's ministry— thereby affirming its own self-identity on Biblical grounds. While the Qur'an turns to other sources besides the Bible in its engagement with Judaism and Christianity, it can be stated with confidence that its use of the Biblical narrative has a privileged place in the discussion.

The Qur'an affirms the Torah in very strong terms. According to the hadith literature a group of Jews in Madinah came to the Prophet for a judgment on an halakhic issue— the punishment for adultery. In response to this query by the Jewish community to the Blessed Prophet the Qur'an says:

…why do they come to you for judgment when they have the Torah with God's judgment and even then still turn away? These are not believers. We revealed the Torah with guidance and light (5:43).

The Qur'anic affirmation of the Gospels is in very similar terms:

We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, in their [the Hebrew Prophets'] footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospels with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed— a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God (5:46).

The fact that the affirmation of the Torah and Gospels as containing "guidance, light" holds true even for the maculate versions of these scriptures is suggested by the following *ayah*. Here the Qur'an asks the Blessed Prophet (and the Muslims) to directly address the Jews and Christians possessing sacred scriptures:

Say, "People of the Book, you have no true basis [for your religion/arguments] unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospels and that which has been sent down to you from your Lord." (5:68).

The Qur'anic affirmation of the Torah and Gospels is further accentuated by the fact that it uses these scriptures as proof texts in its critique of particular beliefs and practices in the religious traditions claiming a Biblical origin. On certain occasions the Qur'an states explicitly that there is no Biblical warrant for a particular belief/practice, i.e. 3:93 in reference to Jewish dietary laws, 3:65 in reference to Jewish and Christian claims regarding the religious identity of Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him). On other occasions it implies that there is no Biblical warrant by using phrases such as "We did not enjoin it on them…" (57:48) in reference to Christian monasticism, or phrases like "Say bring forth your proof if you are indeed truthful" (2:111) in reference to Jewish claims about the outcome of the Final Reckoning. The possibility that the Qur'anic affirmation of the Torah and Gospel as containing "guidance, light" holds in the present tense, is made even stronger by the way that the Qur'an uses the Biblical narrative as a

witness on behalf of the ministry of the Blessed Prophet. Allah says in the Qur'an:

> ***I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of Allah and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the messenger— the unlettered prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them and in the Gospels— who commands then to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, and relieves them of their burdens and the iron collars that were on them*** (7:156-7).

In terms that we have used earlier, the Qur'an is squaring the circle in relation to the Abrahamic/Biblical tradition. The Qur'anic narrative is simultaneously playing the role of a dissenting prophetic witness from within the Biblical tradition while at the same time affirming its own identity on Biblical grounds. In very concrete and direct terms the Qur'an links its own identity to the Abrahamic/Biblical tradition— which is the very tradition that it is also criticizing (in its Jewish and Christian variations). It is indeed the case that the Qur'anic narrative goes on to transcend the grounds on which it engages Judaism and Christianity— but that transcending makes no sense whatsoever (actually it is not even possible) in the absence of the initial engagement. In other words the Qur'an never questions the legitimacy of the common grounds that it shares with Judaism and Christianity. In fact, besides explicitly affirming these grounds as containing "guidance, light" the Qur'an further affirms them by pointing out that particular beliefs and practices in Judaism and Christianity find no warrant in these grounds. The affirmation is further stressed when the Qur'an claims to be the culmination and fulfilment of the Biblical event. In a significant part of its discourse with Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an engages these variants of the Abrahamic tradition— modifying a phrase used earlier— "within the limits of the Bible alone".

Given the manner in which the Qur'an engages the Biblical narrative in its encounter with Judaism and Christianity, the question emerges: Does the Qur'an contain any resources that make it possible for contemporary Islam to engage with the modern world in the same methodological terms? I think the answer is a very clear "YES". In the first section I identified the

Enlightenment enshrinement of human reason as the single most daunting obstacle that any "dissenting voice within the reality of the modern world" has to face. The manner and frequency with which the Qur'an addresses the issue of *'aql* or "reason" and "rational thought" suggests that the valuation of these sources is not completely dissimilar from its valuation of the Biblical narrative. If this is indeed the case then an argument can be made that there is Qur'anic warrant for engaging with Enlightenment paradigm "within the limits of reason alone." Before detailing the Qur'anic valuation of *'aql* in light of its valuation of the Torah and the Gospels, a brief word on another similarity. It is obvious that there is a significant difference between the Qur'anic "*Taurat*" and the "Torah" of Rabbinic Judaism. It is also the case that the Qur'anic "*Injeel*" differs significantly from the "Gospels" of the Church. In spite of these radical (and unbridgeable) differences it would be patently false to claim that there is no similarity between the Qur'anic and the non-Qur'anic conceptions. It would have to be further acknowledged that the similarity is significant enough for a meaningful conversation and exchange to be based on "Biblical grounds". Similarly, the Qur'anic understanding of *'aql* differs significantly from the Enlightenment understanding of "reason" and "rationality"— but this difference is not so huge as to preclude the possibility of "reason" providing a common ground for conversation and exchange. If the similarity between the Qur'anic *'aql* and Enlightenment "reason" and "rationality" is not recognized (or if there is no similarity to be recognized)[193] then any interaction between Islam and the Enlightenment tradition will be an exercise in polemics and apologetics rather than meaningful exchange.

While the Qur'an does not explicitly say that human *'aql* contains "light, guidance" it does say repeatedly that misguided people groping about in the dark are not using their reasoning faculties (*'aql*) properly. On nearly two dozen occasions the Qur'an condemns those who misuse their *'aql* and thereby turn away from light and guidance. For example, the Qur'an has Abraham (peace be upon him) saying to the idol-worshippers:

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[193] If it is indeed the case that there is no similarity between Qur'anic *'aql* and Enlightenment "reason" then there is very little practical value or meaningful substance in the line of argument in this presentation.

Shame upon you and that which you worship besides Allah! Will you not, then, use your reason? (21:67)

On the Day of Judgment, Allah will say to those who followed Satan:

He had already led astray a great many of you: could you not, then use your reason? (36:62).

On nearly three dozen other occasions the Qur'an states those who use their *'aql* properly will be blessed with "seeing the light" (so to speak) and guided to straight path. For example:

Thus do We spell out these* ayaat (signs) *unto people who use their reason (30: 28).

And:

And in the succession of night and day, and in the means of subsistence which God sends down from the skies, giving life thereby to earth after it had been lifeless, and in the change of the winds: [in all this] there are* ayaat (signs) *for people who use their reason (45:5).

What the Qur'an lacks in explicit formulation it makes up by implicit pointers. While never explicitly saying that human reason contains "light, guidance", on nearly five dozen different occasions the Qur'an draws attention to the inherent value in using the *'aql* properly and the pitfalls of not using it properly. In contrast there are only about one dozen references to the Torah and Gospels in the same vein. Consequently, the use of reason as the grounds on which to critique the Enlightenment and affirm the Islamic alternative is as Qur'anically authentic as the Qur'an's use of the Bible in its engagement with Judaism and Christianity.

In light of the foregoing discussion on the necessity of remaining "within the limits of reason alone" in the critique of the modern world, it is obvious that critiques of modernity emanating from the quarters of perennial philosophy and different traditionalisms are inadequate. But the fact that

these responses do not measure up to the standards proposed in this presentation is not their most egregious offence (if it can be considered an offence at all.) Far more egregious is the fact that these critiques violate a cardinal principle that is at the heart of all spiritual teachings. Because of this violation (which may actually be a logical corollary of not remaining within the limits of reason alone in the critique of the Enlightenment) perennialism and traditionalism have practically abdicated the role/responsibility of being an affirming prophetic witness. In its Islamic expression this cardinal principle of spiritual teachings is the Sufi saying that "all things have two sides, one pointing to God and the other pointing away from God". In the context of the present discussion this basically means that one can/should take a stance of critiquing dissent and affirming witness with respect to all cultural phenomena. It simply cannot be the case that the Enlightenment is worse than the days of *jahiliyyah*— even the pre-Islamic Arab tradition had noble characteristics that Islam not only affirmed but internalized. But in looking at the analysis of modernity produced by the aforementioned schools, one can be excused for coming to the conclusion that the Enlightenment is an absolutely unique phenomenon in human history in the sense that it has only one side— and that side is worthy of only critique and condemnation. It might have been plausible to dismiss the Enlightenment as having only one side— the one that faces away from God— in the 18th and 19th centuries. But given the evidence that has been accumulating since the beginning of the 20th century it is difficult to discount the fact that a religious/monotheistic impulse is at work within the Enlightenment paradigm. Consequently, it is among the most pressing demands of the day to face this paradigm squarely (both in its negativity as well as its positivity) and engage with it constructively.

Muhammad Iqbal's interpretation of the mythic Fall from Eden provides the grounds on which a constructive response to the Enlightenment can be articulated on Qur'anic grounds. Iqbal argues that from the Qur'anic perspective the Fall, as painful and tragic as it was, also made human culture, goodness, and faith possible. Prior to the fall it is not possible to speak of any of these things because in the Garden "there is neither hunger, nor thirst, neither heat nor nakedness" (20:118-119). For Iqbal the human being's blissful state of existence in the Garden of Eden is symbolic

> of a primitive state in which man is practically unrelated to his environment and consequently does not feel the sting of human wants, the birth of which alone marks the beginning of human culture".[194]

We can take Iqbal's observation further and note that the human being's relationship with the Divine is also characterized by the same naiveté as his relationship with the physical environment in Eden. Prior to the Fall there is no question of lack of faith, doubt, or distance between the human and the Divine— these are not even possibilities prior to the Fall. For Iqbal the Fall is the event that brought with it new possibilities of human relations with the Divine, with the physical environment and with other human beings— relations based on a free, conscious, rational choice in contrast to relations based on a naïve acceptance (and affirmation) of the given. For Iqbal the Fall symbolically represents,

> man's rise from a primitive stage of instinctive appetite [and we can say naïve faith] to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience [and we may say consciously/rationally chosen faith]. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flashes of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being.[195]

Iqbal does not see the Fall as some catastrophic tragedy in some absolute ontological sense. This interpretation of the Fall requires a re-thinking of the first act of disobedience. The fact that the act is a mistake is self-evident because the individuals who committed it recognized it as being such. But that does not mean that the act has only negative connotations. Iqbal notes:

> Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice; and that is why, according to the Qur'anic narration, Adam's first transgression was forgiven. Now goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing co-operation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly

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[194] Iqbal, 67,
[195] Ibid, 67ff.

determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of goodness.[196]

It is only in the aftermath of this act of disobedience that we can speak of the possibility of human-Divine relation being a matter of a "free surrender to [a] moral ideal aris[ing] out of a willing co-operation of free egos". To put it bluntly, the Fall brings with it the possibility of a qualitatively different[197]

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196 Ibid, 68.

197 As regards the qualitatively different "new possibilities of human relations with the Divine" an analogy could be drawn, based on the prophetic traditions, between the situation described here and that which is reported in the hadith literature; the difference between the earlier and later generations of believers and the possibilities that are available to the believers of the later ages.

حَدَّثَنَا هَاشِمُ بْنُ الْقَاسِمِ حَدَّثَنَا جَسْرٌ عَنْ ثَابِتٍ عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَدِدْتُ أَنِّي لَقِيتُ إِخْوَانِي قَالَ فَقَالَ أَصْحَابُ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَوَلَيْسَ نَحْنُ إِخْوَانَكَ قَالَ أَنْتُمْ أَصْحَابِي وَلَكِنْ إِخْوَانِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِي وَلَمْ يَرَوْنِي (مسند أحمد: 12169)

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْمُغِيرَةِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا الْأَوْزَاعِيُّ قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي أَسِيدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَنْ خَالِدِ بْنِ دُرَيْكٍ عَنْ أَبِي مُحَيْرِيزٍ قَالَ قُلْتُ لِأَبِي جُمُعَةَ رَجُلٍ مِنْ الصَّحَابَةِ حَدِّثْنَا حَدِيثًا سَمِعْتَهُ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ نَعَمْ أُحَدِّثُكُمْ حَدِيثًا جَيِّدًا تَغَدَّيْنَا مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَمَعَنَا أَبُو عُبَيْدَةَ بْنُ الْجَرَّاحِ فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ خَيْرٌ مِنَّا أَسْلَمْنَا مَعَكَ وَجَاهَدْنَا مَعَكَ قَالَ نَعَمْ قَوْمٌ يَكُونُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِي وَلَمْ يَرَوْنِي (مسند أحمد: 16529)

The Prophet said, "I long to meet my brothers". The Companions asked, "Are we not your brothers?" He said, "You are my Companions but my brothers are those who have not seen me and have faith in me". (*Musnad Ahmad*, 12169)

Abu Ubaydah ibn Jarrah asked, "O Messenger of God, we have believed in thee and we have fought side by side with thee, would there be any body better than us?" The Prophet said, "Yes, those who shall be after you, those who have not seen me and have faith in me". (*Musnad Ahmad*, 16529)

Mishkat, in the section titled "Bab-al-Iman" also has a report in the same vein. The text goessomething like this:

"The Prophet asked the Companions, 'Who in all of creation possesses the most beautiful faith (*'ajab-al-iman*)?' The companions replied "The angels." The Prophet said "How is it that they would not have faith while they are in the presence of their Lord." Then the Companions said; "The Prophets". The Blessed Prophet said "How is it that they would not have *Iman* when wahy descends upon them." Then the Companions said, "Then it must be us". The Prophet replied "How is it that you would not have *iman* while I am among you". Then the Prophet said "Those among creation who have the most beautiful *iman* will be

human affirmation of the Divine (and a Divine affirmation of the human[198]) than was possible prior to the Fall.[199]

Iqbal's description of the Fall suggests the tasting of the forbidden fruit heralded the onset of an enlightenment prior to the modern Enlightenment. The enlightenment resulting from the tasting of the forbidden fruit was the result of the exercise of a God-given wilful free choice, brought with the birth of a new (rational) consciousness and opened up new horizons of human culture and human relations with the Divine. The fact that the more recent Enlightenment period marks the birth of new understanding of human consciousness, human will and human freedom is not disputed by anyone. Perhaps a more cautious (and accurate) statement would be that the Enlightenment offered a more rational and comprehensible description of human will, human freedom and human consciousness than was possible prior to it. On all of these points the Enlightenment departs from tradition and opens up new horizons for human culture and human consciousness. Going beyond the rhetoric of good and evil and leaving aside value-judgments, it can be stated with confidence that the Enlightenment break with tradition is not unlike the original Fall from Eden— an act that results from the tasting of the forbidden fruit and creates a rupture as a result but which at the same time also contains the resources not only for self-correction but also self-enhancement. The fact that there is an element of the

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your brothers who come after you, they will find leaves with writing on them and they will believe in the contents".

198 This is quite obvious from the text of a well known hadith qudsi in which Allah says: "If humanity were to stop sinning I would destroy it and bring in its place a creature who sins – so that I may [have the opportunity to] forgive". This hadith suggests that the manner in which Allah relates to the human being plays a central role in His Own Self-Understanding. In the absence of the act of eating the forbidden fruit some of key attributes of Allah remain hidden or un-manifest – it is only in the aftermath of this "tragic" act that the Divine Glory has the opportunity to manifest itself more fully.

199 It should be mentioned in passing that after the Fall it is not possible to return to the state of naïve bliss that was present before the Fall. Those who return to Eden in the here-after, Adam and Eve (peace be upon them both) no less than any other human being, will return with a very different understanding of the Divine, the human self and the relation of the human self to the Divine than they had when the originally left Eden. It is nothing more than naïve romanticism to endeavour to recapture the bliss of the original naiveté after it has been shattered.

"Fall" in the Enlightenment is recognized by the religiously unmusical Max Weber— but the same intellectual honesty that leads him to see the problematic side of the phenomenon also opens up his eyes to the latent potentialities in it:

> The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the *meaning* of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself. It must recognize that general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge…[200].

Taking Weber's observation as a starting point, but going beyond it, it can be further said that as was the case with the enlightenment resulting from the original Fall the potential for self-correction and self-enhancement in the aftermath of the modern Enlightenment can only be realized with the aid of the Divine Word.

In sum the Qur'anic engagement with Judaism and Christianity provides scriptural grounds of the rationale informing the squaring of the circle approach. And the Qur'anic narrative of the Fall, as interpreted by Iqbal provides the scriptural grounds of the rationale informing the circling of the square approach. Taken together this scripturally grounded rationale complements and affirms the rationale based on reason offered in the first two sections of this paper regarding the most fruitful and promising approach to take in Islam's encounter with the modern West.

A Final Word

I began my presentation by noting Murad's observation that in order to square the circle adequately, contemporary Islam will have to become a "prophetic, dissenting voice within the reality of the modern world". During the course of my presentation, I have tried to remain consistent with the line

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[200] Weber, M. (1949) "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press. p. 57.

of reasoning contained in this observation. If I depart from some of Murad's conclusions it is only because of the imperative of consistency (or at least I'd like to think this is the case). Remaining consistent with this line of reasoning means that the dissent from the Enlightenment can only be "within the limits of reason alone". It also means that the prophetic witness will have to play the indispensable role of affirming witness from outside the Enlightenment tradition— affirming some of the deepest aspirations of Enlightenment ethos from the Qur'anic perspective. In the last section I have endeavoured to provide the Qur'anic warrant for the reasoned rationale informing the squaring the circle and circling the square approach, thereby suggesting there is a common logic underpinning both the reasoned and the Qur'anic rationales. As a final word I'd like to explicitly articulate this logic. The logic underpinning both of the approaches offered above with respect to the ultimate goal of Islam in its encounter with the modern West is not to critique-condemn-replace but to redeem-reform-embrace. It is obvious that this is the Qur'anic logic in its engagement with Judaism and Christianity as well as its approach to the events surrounding the Fall. Speaking from the Qur'anic perspective, while there is certainly something deeply problematic in the modern reality that needs to be critiqued loudly (just as there is something deeply problematic in the Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as the Fall that needs to be critiqued loudly), the critique cannot become reified. The critique is a means towards redeeming, which itself is a prelude to reforming with the ultimate goal being the embracing of the afflicted paradigm/event.[201]

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[201] I think that Murad is much closer to advocating a "redeem, reform, embrace" approach to the Enlightenment than appears to be the case at first glance. This is suggested by the proposal he makes regarding contemporary Islam's engagement with modern feminism. The following is a quote from the concluding part of Murad's essay titled "Islam, Irigaray and the Retrieval of Gender": http://www.masud.co.uk.islam./ahm/gender.htm

Feminism, in any case, has no orthodoxy, as Fiorenza reminds us; and certain of its forms are repellent to us, and are clearly damaging to women and society, while others may demonstrate striking convergences with the Shari'a and our gendered cosmologies. We advocate a nuanced understanding which tries to bypass the sexism-versus-feminism dialectic by proposing a theology in which the Divine is truly gender neutral, but gifts humanity with a legal code and family norms which are rooted in the understanding that, as

In the final analysis if there is one unredeemable part of the Enlightenment tradition it is the fact that it allowed its critique of illumination, wisdom and the Divine turns into an outright rejection because of the reification of the critique. The flip-side of this reified critique is the fact that the Enlightenment affirmation of individualism, universalism and materialism became a set of reified/dogmatic assertions based on completely abstract concepts rather than a living (and life-giving) ethos. It is obviously the case that the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment analysis of illumination, wisdom and the Divine laid bare deeply problematic aspects of traditional culture that were not known before. But instead of endeavouring to redress these problematic aspects of traditional culture as a "philosophic healer" using the resources already present in the afflicted paradigm, Enlightenment thought played the role of a colonizing imperialist on a mission to civilize the savages by means of socio-cultural engineering. In short the only unredeemable aspect of the Enlightenment is that its stance towards non-Enlightenment paradigms is one of critique-condemn-replace.

But in the interests of intellectual honesty it must be forcefully stated that the "sin" of reification is not a peculiarly Enlightenment/modern/Western shortcoming— it is a universal human potential. Furthermore, long before the birth of the modern West, this potential was actualized repeatedly during the course of history by every "traditional" religion known to historians. The very fact that each religious tradition has witnessed a "reformation" of some type is evidence enough of the fact that reification has set in. Social scientific analysis of the different religious tradition has laid bare the inescapable fact that particular theologies and institutions, throughout the course of religious history, have been identified with Absolute or Ultimate Truth. This is no less true of the Islamic tradition than others. Just as the effective diagnosis and remedy of the reifications of religious traditions in the past did not mean the

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Irigaray insists, the sexes 'are not equal but different', and will naturally gravitate towards divergent roles which affirm rather than suppress their respective genius.

Murad is arguing that the most fruitful Islamic response to modern feminism is "redeem, reform, embrace" rather than "critique, condemn, replace". In this particular quote if the term "feminism" is replaced with "Enlightenment" and if the "sexism-versus-feminism dialectic" is replaced with the "modernism-versus-traditionalism dialectic" then it obvious that the "redeem, reform, embrace" approach is as applicable to the Enlightenment in general as it is to feminism in particular.

abandoning of the tradition itself, a meaningful response to the reifications of the Enlightenment tradition cannot mean the abandoning of the tradition itself. To adopt the position that the Enlightenment tradition has to be abandoned in its entirety in response to its shortcomings is to exhibit the worst characteristics of that which one is critiquing and rejecting. This basically means that one has adopted the same attitude towards the Enlightenment paradigm that the Enlightenment paradigm had adopted towards traditional religion and classical philosophy. This is not only a modernist move in the most negative sense, but also one that is unlikely to bear fruit. A more sane approach "albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one" and one that is built on scripturally (Qur'anically) reasoned grounds is redeem-reform-embrace— an approach that will lead to enhanced understanding on the part of a troubled and alienated self, as a result of it critical but empathetic study of the alien other.

"VOLTAIRE'S BASTARDS": A RESPONSE TO BASIT KOSHUL'S "STUDYING THE WESTERN OTHER…"

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

Postmodernism took hold of the intellectual scene during the later half of the twentieth century. It was well before its occupying the centre stage, while Modernity held its sway, that, amidst an erosion of earlier cultural values as well as a blurring of the distinctive characteristics of the world's traditional civilizations— giving rise to philosophic and moral relativism, multiculturalism, and dangerous fundamentalist reactions— many thinkers diagnosed these tendencies and suggested various remedies. Best among these were characterized by a foundational critique of the modern world coupled with a call for intellectual reform; a renewed examination of metaphysics, the traditional sciences, and symbolism, with special reference to the ultimate unanimity of all spiritual traditions; and finally, a call to the work of spiritual realization. It was in the wake of Postmodernism that we hear a sage saying the following:

> … it should be pointed out that if the West needs the East, the latter also has need of the West— not of the West as such, of course, but of such few thinkers in the West as have managed to integrate their experiences of the modern world in a traditional and spiritual outlook that might, if one likes, be described as "oriental" or "mediaeval". When in contact with the West, Orientals generally display an astonishing lack of suspicion and this can be explained by the fact that the modern world, while being a "necessary evil", is not a normal possibility. Now the Western elite to which we are referring is endowed with a "discernment of spirits" and a sense of proportion that often are lacking in Orientals; the latter, however, today stand greatly in need of these particular qualities, not on the still uncontaminated soil of their own civilisation where they understand what

they are doing, but outside it in a chaotic world that violates every framework and insinuates itself everywhere."[202]

Basit is an Oriental by lineage but living in the West and receiving his entire education in the Western Academic world has given him the opportunity to "integrate his experiences of the modern world in a traditional and spiritual outlook." The recent outcome, his article "Studying the Western Other, Understanding the Islamic Self: A Qur'anically Reasoned Perspective" has offered me the possibility to reconsider and re-evaluate certain settled convictions about the Enlightenment paradigm and the issue of the Western Other and to revisit the 'half-truths' that used to create obstacles to an appreciation of the point in question. I would have preferred to begin my response on a non personal note but since his article has held a mirror to my thinking and has challenged the mode of interpretation used for studying Modernity, I have been goaded into responding otherwise. It has changed the frontiers of my views on the matter and, in some cases at least, has pulled down the isolating walls that separated one perspective from another. The destruction of such walls may be an evil; but the virtues it helped to promote are indispensable and must be supported by other means. In what follows I have tried to explore these other means. But first let me mention a host of questions that assailed me during reading his article and think loudly about some of the premises which inform Basit's vision and see if these lead to a few complications, at least from my lights.

Basit speaks of "the twin tasks of dissension and affirmation from within the reality of the modern world "[203] (Basit, p. 4) that Islam has to undertake for successfully "squaring of the circle." As could be surmised from the general thrust of the argument in the article the reality of the modern world is equated with the Enlightenment paradigm and its social program that was "most consistently and systematically institutionalized in the modern, secular West."(Basit, p. 9) Can we refer to the reality of the modern world as a monolithic whole or there is a need to differentiate between the conceptual shifts that distinguish Modernity from the Postmodern and "beyond-

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[202] Frithjof Schuon,

[203] Emphasis my own.

Postmodern"[204] paradigms? According to my lights a distinction needs to be made on at least two counts; the obsessive concern with society that is a hallmark of Postmodernism as well as its radical departure from "Enlightenment philosophy's categorically rejects the limited and relational character of the human mind/reason" and "enshrinement of reason" (Basit, p. 5, 21) espoused by the Enlightenment paradigm to a position that could be termed as "the collapse of faith in reason's power, thus to hold court."[205] This would entail, for the obvious reason, that we take a different and perhaps more challenging set of "difficulties inherent" into consideration that arise with Postmodernism and its aftermath. I will have the occasion to say something more on this point later.

The same remark holds good for philosophy. "Concern with wisdom, illumination and the Divine" (Basit, p. 4) was shared by pre-modern religious traditions and classical philosophy and "philosophy as a means of "attaining wisdom" was seen as being inseparable from the choice of a particular way of life (Basit, p. 5).[206] Both the Enlightenment paradigm and its Postmodern and beyond-Postmodern conceptual shifts profoundly differ from this shared vision of the entire pre-Modern world. They are, however, not similar in their disagreement, hence can not be subsumed under a single disclaimer. If the Enlightenment paradigm revolted against the pre-Modern in the name of a Promethean humanism resulting in an "enshrinement of autonomous human reason" and claimed that that there is an objective, universally applicable court of appeal that can adjudicate between worldviews, determining their

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[204] David Ray Griffin has termed it "reversionary Postmodernism". See David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989.

[205] Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind,* Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000, pp. 133-142.

[206] For a representative narrative, elucidating the long standing position of definition, function and purpose of philosophy in Islam, see M. S. Umar, (Comp.), "*From the Niche of Prophecy*"— *Nasr's Position on Islamic Philosophy with in the Islamic Tradition*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2000.

truth or falsity, Postmodernism is relativistic, nihilistic and signifies loss of faith in reason's power.[207] This remark allows for a digression.

Some where, during the course of its historical development, western thought took a sharp turn in another direction. It branched off as a tangent from the collective heritage of all humanity and claimed the autonomy of reason. It chose to follow that reason alone, unguided by revelation and cut off from the Intellect that was regarded as its transcendent root.[208] Political and social realms quickly followed suit. Autonomous statecraft and excessive individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful.[209] A few centuries of unbridled activity led Western philosophy to an impasse.[210]

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[207] A quick overview of the course of philosophy would elucidate the point. I have selected Huston Smith to make the point for me. "If logic isn't philosophy's essence (Quine) and language isn't either (Davidson), the question "what essence remains?" cannot be avoided. We can argue over whether "essence" is the right word here, but let us come to the point. The deepest reason for the current crisis in philosophy is its realization that autonomous reason—reason without infusions that both power and vector it —is helpless. By itself, reason can deliver nothing apodictic. Working (as it necessarily must) with variables, variables are all it can come up with. The Enlightenment's "natural light of reason" turns out to have been a myth. Reason is not itself a light. It is more like a transformer that does useful things but on condition that it is hitched to a generator.

[208] See Martin Lings, "Intellect and Reason" in *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, repr. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988, 57-68; F. Schuon, *Gnosis Divine Wisdom* London: J. Murray, 1978, 93-99; S. H. Nasr, "Knowledge and its Desacralization" in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 1-64; Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 60-95. Also see his *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind,* Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000).

[209] See René Guenon, "Individualism" in *Crisis of the Modern World,* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981, 51-65. Also see Social Chaos" in the same document.

[210] For a few representative writings that indicate this situation, see "Scientism, Pragmatism and the Fate of Philosophy, *Inquiry*, No. 29, p. 278, cf. Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, loc. cit. p. 142, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004; Hilary Putnam, "After Empiricism" in *Behaviorism*, 16:1 (Spring 1988); Alasdair MacIntrye, "Philosophy; Past Conflict and Future Direction," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Supplement to 16/1, (September 1987); also see *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 59 (1986), and Kenneth Baynes et al., *Philosophy*: *End or Transformation*? (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

Commenting upon the situation, Huston Smith remarked, "the deepest reason for the crisis in philosophy is its realization that autonomous reason—reason without infusions that both power and vector it— is helpless. By itself, reason can deliver nothing apodictic. Working, as it necessarily must, with variables, variables are all it can come up with. The Enlightenment's "natural light of reason" turns out to have been a myth. Reason is not itself a light. It is more than a conductor, for it does more than transmit. It seems to resemble an adapter which makes useful translations but on condition that it is powered by a generator."[211] The nature and direction of these "infusions" is still being debated.[212]

Clearly aware of reason's contingency, medieval philosophy attached itself to theology as its handmaiden. Earlier, Plato too had accepted reason's contingency and grounded his philosophy in intuitions that are discernible by the "eye of the soul" but not by reason without it. In the seventeenth century, though, responding to the advent of modern science with the controlled experiment as its new and powerful way of getting at truth, philosophy unplugged from theology. Bacon and Comte were ready to replug it at once, this time into science, but there were frequencies science still couldn't register, so philosophy took off on its own.

Modern philosophy took off in the seventeenth century by declaring its independence from theology; Descartes set it on its course by dedicating it to the proposition that reason, its instrument, can stand on its own. An

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[211] Huston Smith, "Crisis in Modern Philosophy", in *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind,* Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1990; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004, p. 137.

[212] Huston Smith has pointed towards the possibility of accepting these "infusions" from *Philosophia Perennis* or *Religio-Perennis,* the sapiential doctrines of mankind. See his "Two Traditions and Philosophy" in *Religion of the Heart— Essays Presented to Frithjof Schuon on his 80th Birthday,* (Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1991, 278-296. In this regard also see F. Schuon, "Tracing the Notion of Philosophy," *Sufism Veil and Quintessence* Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1985, 115-128; *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (New York: Harper and Row, 1975; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004.

A similar awareness could be discerned in the arena of politics, humanities, and social sciences. The impasse, though with different implications, was reached by the parallel paradigm of autonomous politics and social sciences which had refused to accept any "infusion" from a higher domain.

important reason for thinking that modernity has come to an end is that its faith in autonomous reason has now collapsed. Recent developments in beyond-Postmodern (or reversionary Postmodern) theology indicate that, finding the Modern (read Enlightenment) position untenable, it now claims that its reason should not be called autonomous and therefore Modern, for it insists that it is not autonomous: reason in their view must be supplemented by vision. But this augmented reason still continues to look Modern to my lights in claiming the power to winnow the visions that supplement it, accepting or rejecting them by the standards it imposes.[213]

This brings us to the core issue of the shared ground. If Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernism are so radically apart on the question of reason and human rationality how can we safely speak of a shared ground? "Because of the Enlightenment's rejection of the traditional religious/philosophical understanding of wisdom, illumination and the Divine human reason/mind[214] are left as the only shared ground [215] on which the dissenting voice and the dominant paradigm can relate to each other. Consequently, if the squaring of the circle is to be done as a dissenting voice from within the modern world then the following conditions will have to be met: a) human mind/reason be the court of appeal for all critique/complaints and b) human mind/reason be the foundation on which all principles are affirmed/stand." (Basit, p. 7) All religious/wisdom traditions and almost all pre-modern philosophy drew a sharp distinction between ratio and intellectus inasmuch as the latter operates intuitively and directly and were unanimous that reason operated in the restricted region of the mind's domain. Modernity, Postmodernism and, to a large extent,[216] beyond-Postmodern theology (or reversionary Postmodern) are at the antipodes of this view. I need not go into the details of the issue here as we are all well aware of the problem. The point I like to register is that it is difficult to see how, in the absence of a shared definition of reason and

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[213] In this regard see the important debate between David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989.

[214] Emphasis my own.

[215] Emphasis my own.

[216] I say so because that which the beyond-Postmodern theology calls "*prehensions*" is what comes closest to Tradition's "*intellection*".

human rationality and with the collapse of faith in a universally applicable court of appeal, critiques/complaints could be addressed meaningfully and how the dissenting voice and the dominant paradigm can relate to each other?

Citing the examples of "squaring the circles in the past" in the case "of numerous non-Arab cultural configurations" (Basit, p. 8) he has mentioned the pre Islamic Arab civilization as well where "….the prophetic witness offers a revelatory affirmation of some of the real but dormant aspirations and potentialities at the very heart of its socio-cultural environment, whose emergence and maturation is being forestalled by neglect and forgetfulness." (Basit, p. 9) The argument culminates in saying that "there has to be an Islamic affirmation of some of the deepest aspirations that are at the heart of the Enlightenment project." (Basit, p. 9) According to my lights this seems to be a problematic analogy. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized Modernity. The Arabs of the times of the Prophet had many dormant virtues and they had principles. Their principles were lacking in height, confined to the horizontal plane, without any consciousness of the relationship between human virtues and the Divine Qualities of which they are the reflections. None the less, human virtues cannot exist without their archetypes, which is another way of saying that in these men the apparently missing link was not absent but dormant; and inevitably the degree of dormancy varied from man to man. The prophetic witness triggered its awakening. It derives its legitimacy from the inherent principles and practice of the Islamic Tradition itself. Islamic Tradition, from its vantage point of being the summer-up, incorporated— obviously with alterations, amendments, abrogations and adaptations— the "Judeo-Christian" elements; especially the legal (or Shariite, in the technical sense of the word) aspects of the Mosaic code and the esoteric elements of the Christian message. These elements were brought to perfection in addition to the specifically Islamic aspects of the new faith in the Islamic revelation. This process, as it was accomplished on a purely vertical plane, had the stamp of divine sanction on it which distinguished it from any subsequent attempts that the Islamic community may had envisaged in the same direction. Nevertheless it had the significant role of setting the example for integrating ideas and symbols of pre-Islamic origin into the unitary perspective of Islam and its general

framework. This could not be the case of a mindset which is woven out of a rejection of Transcendence. Enlightenment paradigm rejected Transcendence or a certain interpretation of it that denied human reason its legitimate rights and refused to meet its demands. This is a question that defies neat solutions and needs further deliberations to which I would return later.

Let me begin with an important clarification because my observations noted above may have led the readers to believe that I see the Enlightenment paradigm flawed on all counts. That is not the case. I have voiced my reservations about one, albeit a fundamental and very important, aspect of the Enlightenment project. I will rely on Huston Smith to make the point for me.

A worldview is an inclusive outlook, and it is useful to distinguish its social, cosmological, and metaphysical components. The social component of past worldviews included, at times, justifications for slavery and the divine right of kings, while its cosmological components described the physical universe as understood by the science of the day— Ptolemaic astronomy or whatever. The contents of those two components obviously change, so are not perennial. The perennial, unchanging philosophy is metaphysical, or more precisely, ontological. It concerns such matters as the distinction between the Absolute and the relative, and the doctrine of the degrees of reality that is consequent thereon.[217]

Following this threefold criteria I would like say a few words about the Metaphysical, Cosmological and Sociological achievements/shortcomings of Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernism, respectively. In doing so I am responding to Basit's assertion "it must be the case that the Enlightenment has two sides– one pointing to God and the other pointing away from Him." (Basit, p. 23) This is a very pertinent question because if the Enlightenment paradigm has its virtues and human virtues cannot exist without their archetypes how did Enlightenment come to possess these virtues without any consciousness of the relationship between human virtues and the Divine Qualities of which they are the reflections? Is that a phenomenon similar to

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[217] David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 62.

the pre Islamic Arabia? Before we say anything on it let us have a brief overview of the Metaphysical, Cosmological and Sociological achievements/shortcomings of Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernism.[218]

When we align these problems with the three[219] major periods in human history: the traditional period,[220] the Modern period,[221] and Postmodernism,[222] it is obvious that each of these periods poured more of its energies into, and did better by, one of life's inescapable problems than did the other two. Specifically, Modernity gave us our view of nature,[223] Postmodernism is tackling social injustices more resolutely than people previously did. This leaves worldviews— metaphysics as distinct from cosmology, which restricts itself to the empirical universe— for our ancestors, whose accomplishments on that front have not been improved upon.[224] Let us shuffle the historical sequence of the periods and proceed topically— from nature, through society, to the Big Picture, tying each topic to the period that did best by it. Modernity first, then Postmodernity, leaving the traditional period for last.

COSMOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF MODERNITY

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[218] I summarize it from Huston Smith, *Religion –Significance and Meaning in an Age of Disbelief*, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2002, pp. 11-22.

[219] For the present discussion I have left out the beyond-Postmodern paradigm and its conceptual shift.

[220] Which extended from human beginnings up to the rise of modern science.

[221] Which took over from there and continued through the first half of the twentieth century

[222] Which Nietzsche anticipated, but which waited for the second half of the twentieth century to take hold.

[223] It continues to be refined, but because modernity laid the foundations for the scientific understanding of it, it deserves credit for the discovery.

[224] The just entered distinction between cosmology and metaphysics is important here, so I shall expand it slightly. *Cosmology* is the study of the physical universe— or the world of nature as science conceives of it— and is the domain of science. *Metaphysics*, on the other hand, deals with all there is. (The terms *worldview* and *Big Picture* are used interchangeably with *metaphysics* in the present discussion.) In the worldview that holds that nature is all there is, metaphysics coincides with cosmology. That metaphysics is named *naturalism*.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe stumbled on a new way of knowing that we refer to as the scientific method. It centres in the controlled experiment and has given us modern science[225] which adds proof to generic science by its controlled experiment. True hypotheses can be separated from false ones, and brick by brick an edifice has been erected from those proven truths. We commonly call that edifice the scientific worldview, but scientific cosmology is more precise because of the ambiguity of the word world. The scientific edifice is a worldview only for those who assume that science can in principle take in all that exists. The scientific cosmology is so much a part of the air we breathe that it is hardly necessary to describe it.[226] Taught from primary schools onward, this story is so familiar that further details would only clutter things.

TRADITION'S COSMOLOGICAL SHORTCOMINGS

That this scientific cosmology retires traditional ones with their six days of creation and the like goes without saying. Who can possibly question that when the scientific cosmology has landed people on the moon?[227] And there is another point. There is a naturalism in Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Islamic Cosmological doctrines and tribal outlooks that in its own way rivals science's calculative cosmology, but that is the naturalism of the artist, the

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[225] Generic science (which consists of careful attention to nature and its regularities) is as old as the hills— at least as old as art and religion.

[226] Some fifteen billion years ago an incredibly compact pellet of matter exploded to launch its components on a voyage that still continues. Differentiation set in as hydrogen proliferated into the periodic table. Atoms gathered into gaseous clouds. Stars condensed from whirling filaments of flame, and planets spun off from those to become molten drops that pulsated and grew rock-encrusted. Narrowing our gaze to the planet that was to become our home, we watch it grow, ocean-filmed and swathed in atmosphere. Some three and a half billion years ago shallow waters began to ferment with life, which could maintain its inner milieu through homeostasis and could reproduce itself. Life spread from oceans across continents, and intelligence appeared. Several million years ago our ancestors arrived. It is difficult to say exactly when, for every few years palaeontologists announce discoveries that "set the human race back another million years or so," as press reports like to break the news.

[227] Our ancestors were impressive astronomers, and we can honour them unreservedly for how much they learned about nature with only their unaided senses to work with.

poet, and the nature lover[228] not that of Galileo and Bacon. For present purposes, aesthetics is irrelevant. Modern cosmology derives from laboratory experiments, not landscape paintings.

POSTMODERNISM'S COSMOLOGICAL SHORTCOMINGS

With traditional cosmology out of the running, the question turns to Postmodernism. Because science is cumulative, it follows as a matter of course that the cosmology we have in the twenty-first century is an improvement over what we had in the middle of the twentieth, which on my timeline is when modernity phased into Postmodernity. But the refinements that postmodern scientists (it is well to say postmodern physics here) have achieved have not affected life to anything like the degree that postmodern social thrusts have, so the social Oscar is the one Postmodernists are most entitled to.[229] Be that as it may, Postmodernism's discoveries (unlike modern discoveries in physics— the laws of gravity, thermodynamics, electromagnetism, relativity theory, and quantum mechanics, which continue to be used to make space shuttles fly and to help us understand how hot electrons behave in semiconductors) have concerned details and exotica.[230]

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[228] Of Li Po, Wordsworth, and Thoreau.

[229] I need to support my contention that postmodern science does not measure up to modern physics in the scope of its discoveries. It says nothing against the brilliance of Stephen Hawking, Fred Hoyle, John Wheeler, Freeman Dyson, Steven Weinberg, and their likes to add that they have discovered nothing about nature that compares with the discoveries of Copernicus, Newton, Maxwell, Planck, Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, Schrödinger, and Born. In molecular chemistry things are different. DNA is a staggering discovery, but— extending back only several billion years compared with the astrophysicists billions of *light* years— it does not pertain to nature's foundations. The fact that no new abstract idea in physics has emerged for seventy years may suggest that nothing more remains to be discovered about nature's foundations.

[230] The billions of dollars that have been spent since the middle of the twentieth century (and the millions of papers that have been written on theories that change back and forth) have produced no discoveries that impact human beings in important ways. All are in the domain of the meta-sciences of high-energy particle physics and astronomy, whose findings— what is supposed to have happened in the first 10-42 seconds of the universe's life, and the like— while headlined by the media have no conceivable connection to human life and can be neither falsified nor checked in normal ways. This allows the building blocks of nature—

Outranking the foregoing reason for not giving the cosmological Oscar to Postmodernism is the fact that the noisiest postmodernists have called into question the very notion of truth by turning claims to truth into little more than power plays.[231] This relativizes science's assertions radically and rules out even the possibility of its closing in on the nature of nature.[232] As there are no neutral standards by which to judge these paradigms, Kuhn's thesis (if unnuanced) leads to relativism among paradigms that places Hottentot science on a par with Newton's. Kuhn himself phrased his thesis carefully enough to parry such relativism, but even taken at its best, it provides no way that science could get to the bottom of things. This demotes the whole enterprise of science as understood by Modernity, and in doing so provides a strong supporting reason for not giving Postmodernism the cosmological prize. It does better with social issues so now we discuss Postmodernism's achievements on the social front.

POSTMODERNISM'S FAIRNESS REVOLUTION

The magic word of Postmodernism is society. This is not surprising. With the belief that there is nothing beyond our present world, nature and society are all that remain, and of the two, nature has become the province of specialists.[233] This leaves society as the domain that presses on us directly and the one in which there is some prospect of our making a difference. And changes are occurring.[234] A quick rehearsal of some changes that have

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particles, strings, or whatever— to keep changing, and the age of the universe to be halved or doubled every now and then. Roughly 99.999 percent of science (scientist Rustum Roy's estimate) is unaffected by these flickering hypotheses, and the public does not much care about their fate.

231 According to this reading of the matter, when people claim that what they say is true, all they are really doing is claiming status for beliefs that advance their own social standing.

232 The most widely used textbook on college campuses for the past thirty years has been Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and its thesis— that facts derive their meaning from the paradigms that set them in place— has shifted attention from scientific facts to scientific paradigms.

233 We seldom confront it directly anymore; mostly it comes to us via supermarkets and cushioned by air-conditioning and central heating.

234 Post colonial guilt may play a part here, and so much remains to be done that self-congratulation is premature.

occurred in a single lifetime makes it clear that social injustices are being recognized and addressed more earnestly today than they were by our ancestors.[235]

TRADITION'S SOCIAL SHORTCOMINGS

These signs of progress acquire additional life when they are set against the unconcern of earlier times regarding such matters. This is an other way of saying what Basit has put forward in is question: "Why is it that the modern,

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[235]• In 1919 the Brooklyn Zoo exhibited an African American caged alongside chimpanzees and gorillas. Today such an act would be met with outrage anywhere in the world.

• The civil rights movement of the 1960s accomplished its major objectives. In the United States and even in South Africa today, people of different races mix where they never could before— on beaches, in airline cabin crews, everywhere.

• In the 1930s, if a streetcar in San Francisco approached a stop where only Chinese Americans were waiting to board, it would routinely pass them by. By contrast, when (fifty years later) I retired from teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, my highly respected chancellor was a Chinese American who spoke English with a Chinese accent.

• No war has ever been as vigorously protested as was the war in Vietnam by United States citizens. When things were going so badly that military leaders advised President Nixon to use nuclear weapons, he declined because (as he said) if he did that, he would face a nation that had taken to the streets.

• The women's movement is only a blink in the eyes of history, but it has already scored impressive victories. Until long after the Civil War, American women really had no civil rights, no legal rights, and no property rights. Not until 1918 did Texas alter its law that everyone had the right to vote except "idiots, imbeciles, aliens, the insane, and women."

• Arguably, the most important theological development of the latter twentieth century was the emergence of the theology of liberation, with its Latin American and feminist versions in the vanguard.

• In an unprecedented move, in March 2000 the pope prayed to God to forgive the sins his church had committed against the people of Israel, against love, peace, and respect for cultures and religions, against the dignity of women and the unity of the human race, and against the fundamental rights of persons. Two months later, two hundred thousand Australians marched across Sydney Harbor Bridge to apologize for their treatment of the aborigines while the sky written word SORRY floated above the Sydney Opera House.

secular West has succeeded in institutionalizing these ideals with a degree of consistency than traditional Muslim society?" There is no reason to think that traditional peoples were more callous than we are, but on the whole they saw their obligations as extending no further than to members of their primary communities: Buddhism's dana (gifts), Jesus' "cup of water given in my name," Islam's "pure due" and their likes. Encountered face-to-face, the hungry were fed, the naked were clothed, and widows and orphans were provided for as means allowed, but there human obligations ended. Injustices that were built into institutions (if such injustices were even recognized) were not human beings' responsibility.[236]

Modernity changed this attitude. Accelerating travel and trade brought encounters between peoples whose societal structures were very different from one another, and these differences showed that such institutions were not like natural laws after all; they were humanly devised and could therefore be critiqued. The French Revolution put this prospect to a historic test; scrapping the divine right of kings, it set out to create a society built on liberty, equality, and fraternity. The experiment failed and the backlash was immediate, but its premise— that societies are malleable— survived.

MODERNITY'S SOCIAL SHORTCOMINGS

Modernity deserves credit for that discovery, and (if we wished) we might excuse it for its poor handling of its discovery on grounds that it was working with a new idea. The record itself, however, is by Postmodern standards, deplorable. Under the pretext of shouldering "the white man's burden" to minister to "lesser breeds without the law," it ensconced colonialism, which raped Asia and Africa, hit its nadir in the Opium Wars of 1841-42, and ended by subjecting the entire civilized world to Western domination.[237]

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[236] Perhaps because for those institutions were considered to be God-given and unalterable. People regarded them in the way we regard laws of nature— as givens to be worked with, not criticized.

[237] David Hume is commonly credited with having the clearest head of all the great philosophers, but I (Huston Smith) read that somewhere in his correspondence (I have not

Having dealt with nature and society, let us turn now to the third inescapable issue that human beings must face: the Big Picture.

MODERNITY'S METAPHYSICAL SHORTCOMINGS

Modernity was metaphysically sloppy. Ravished by science's accomplishments, it elevated the scientific method to "our sacral mode of knowing" (Alex Comfort), and because that mode registers nothing that is without a material component, immaterial realities at first dropped from view and then (as the position hardened) were denied existence. In the distinction registered earlier, this was metaphysics reduced to cosmology.[238] Modernity's Big Picture is materialism or (in its more plausible version) naturalism, which acknowledges that there are immaterial things— thoughts and feelings, for example— while insisting that those things are totally dependent on matter. Both versions are stunted when compared with the traditional outlook. It is important to understand that neither materialism nor naturalism is required by anything science has discovered in the way of actual facts. We have slid into this smallest of metaphysical positions for psychological, not logical, reasons.

POSTMODERNITY'S METAPHYSICAL SHORTCOMINGS

As for Postmodernity, it sets itself against the very idea of such a thing as the Big Picture. It got off on the right foot by critiquing the truncated worldview of the Enlightenment, but from that reasonable beginning it plunged on to argue unreasonably that worldviews (often derisively referred

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been able to find the passage) he wrote that the worst white man is better than the best black man. What I can report firsthand is signs posted in parks of the international settlements in Shanghai, where I attended high school, that read, "No dogs or Chinese allowed." With a virgin continent to rape, the United States did not need colonies, but this did not keep it from hunting down the Native Americans, continuing the institution of slavery, annexing Puerto Rico and Hawaii, and establishing "protectorates" in the Philippines and several other places.

238 When Carl Sagan opened his television series, *Cosmos*, by announcing that "the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be," he presented that unargued assumption as if it were a scientific fact.

to as grand narratives) are misguided in principle.[239] Stated in the in-house idiom Postmodernists are fond of, worldviews "totalize" by "marginalizing" minority viewpoints. They are oppressive in principle and should be resolutely resisted. If hardcore Postmodernism were accurate in this charge one should stop in one's tracks, but it has not proved that it is accurate— it merely assumes that it is accurate and rests its case on examples of oppression that, of course, are not lacking. What has not been demonstrated is the impossibility of a worldview that builds the rights of minorities into its foundations as an essential building block. There is irony here, for the very Postmodernism that is dismissing the possibility of a comprehensive humane outlook is working toward the creation of such through its fairness revolution— its insistence that everybody be given an equal chance at the goods of life. The deeper fact, however, is that to have or not have a worldview is not an option, for peripheral vision always conditions what we are attending to focally, and in conceptual "seeing" the periphery has no cut off. The only choice we have is to be consciously aware of our worldviews and criticize them where they need criticizing, or let them work on us unnoticed and acquiesce to living unexamined lives.

TRADITION'S METAPHYSICAL EXCELLENCE

Neither Modernity nor Postmodernism handled the metaphysical problem well. It is, of course, no proof that Tradition handled it better. The traditional worldview is so out of favour today that the only possible way to gain a hearing for it is to ease into it, so to speak, by suggesting plausibilities wherever openings for them appear. Describing the traditional worldview and defending its merits, therefore, comes close to being the object of an

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[239] ***In* The Postmodern Condition*, Jean Francois Lyotard goes so far as to define postmodernism as "incredulity toward meta-narratives," a synonym for metaphysics. The incredulity takes three forms that grow increasingly shrill as they proceed. Postmodern minimalism contents itself with pointing out that we have no consensual worldview today; "we have no maps and don't know how to make them." Mainline Postmodernism adds, "and never again will we have a consensual worldview, such as prevailed in the Middle Ages, Elizabethan England, or seventeenth century New England; we now know too well how little the human mind can know." Hardcore Postmodernism carries this trajectory to its logical limit by adding, "good riddance!"***

entire book.[240] I will not try to compress it into a page or two here. The present audience, I presume, agrees that with regard to the Postmodernism's religious alternative, we can speak of it in the singular and simply assume that a common metaphysical "spine" underlies the differences in the theologies of the classical languages of the human soul, the world's great religions. This is coupled with the claims of Tradition that people need worldviews, that reliable ones are possible, and that they already exist.

If mainline and polemical Postmodernism were to recede, the obsession with life's social dimension that they saddled us with would relax and we would find ourselves able to think ontologically again. An important consequence of this would be that we would then perceive how much religious outlooks have in common. For one thing, they all situate the manifest, visible world within a larger, invisible whole.[241] The further unanimous claim of religious cosmologies, though, finds no echo in science, for (being a value judgment) it is beyond science's reach. Not only is the invisible real; regions of it are more real and of greater worth than the visible, material world.

The inclusive, presiding paradigm for Tradition is the Great Chain of Being, composed of links ranging in hierarchical order from meagre existents up to the ens perfectissimum; and the foremost student of that concept, Arthur Lovejoy, reported that "most educated persons everywhere accepted [it] without question down to late in the eighteenth century."[242] To that

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[240] See Huston Smith, *Religion— Significance and Meaning in an Age of Disbelief*, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2002; Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth, The Common Vision of the World's Religions,* Harper San Francisco, San Francisco: 1992 (repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1984, 2002). Also see his *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind,* Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989 (repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2002).

[241] This is of particular interest at the moment because currently science does the same. Dark matter doesn't impact any of science's detectors, and the current recipe for the universe is "70 parts cold dark matter, about 30 parts hot dark matter, and just a pinch for all the rest the matter detectable to scientific instruments." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 October 1992, A 16.)

[242] Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 59. Ernst Cassirer corroborates Lovejoy on this point: "The most important legacy of

endorsement, Ken Wilber has added that the Great Chain of Being is "so overwhelmingly widespread...that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history— an error so colossally widespread as to literally stagger the mind— or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear."[243]

An obvious moral emerges from what has been said. If we run a strainer through our past to lift from each of its three periods the gold it contains and let its dross sink back into the sands of history what do we get? Modernity's gold i.e. science is certain to figure importantly in the third millennium, and Postmodernity's focus on justice likewise stands a good chance of continuing. It is the worldview of Tradition that is in jeopardy and must be rehabilitated if it is to survive. Being more specific, the present challenge to the Muslim world is reversed in the sense that it must learn to be tolerant of a world which threatens its very existence without losing its identity and the secularised West must learn the very difficult lesson that its Modern and Postmodern understanding of man and the world is not universal. Moreover, since religion does not acknowledge any principles higher than its own, not even the survival of the human race, if asked to establish peace, it will do so in its own way or not at all.

This brings me back to the initial question of the virtues of Enlightenment paradigm. Basit points out that "The Enlightenment break with traditional religion is as much tied to the affirmation of individualism, universalism and materialism as to the rejection of the notions of wisdom, illumination and the Divine" (Basit, p. 10) and "The Enlightenment affirmation of the dignity of the individual, equality before the law and the value of the material/profane world provides Islam with a unique opportunity to be an affirming witness from outside the modern world" (Basit, p. 11) and "This annual circling (Hajj) of the square is the Islamic affirmation of the irreducible dignity of the individual, the equality of all human beings before the law and the spiritual value of the material world and

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ancient speculation was the concept and general picture of a graduated cosmos" (*Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 9).

[243] Ken Wilber, "The Great Chain of Being," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 33 no. 3 (summer 1993), p. 53.

profane acts" (Basit, p. 11) "there are strong elective affinities between the Qur'anic notion of the human being as an individual, humanity on a universal level and the material/profane worlds and the Enlightenment ideals of individualism, universalism and materialism" (Basit, p. 13). This brings us face to face with certain questions: Did in any epoch ever a worldview (and its translation into practice) achieve these "Enlightenment ideals of individualism, universalism and materialism" without turning its back on wisdom, illumination and the Divine? If Islam succeeded in achieving these ideals without paying its price of rejecting Transcendence (Hajj being a palpable example) what was the saving grace? Moreover Hajj is an Abrahamic ritual predating Islam and the Jews only stopped visiting the outlying Meccan Tabernacle of God when the corruption of its custodians had brought crude idolatry to the sacred precinct. Is it true that early Muslim society and, before that, other human collectivities, had achieved these Enlightenment ideals without severing their roots? A negative inference also imposes itself. If these ideals could be achieved without the burden of "wisdom, illumination and the Divine" why bother? If human reason is not autonomous and it needs objective data to operate effectively, what provided the Enlightenment project with its "infusions" with its rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine? Iqbal's "inductive intellect" (Basit, p. 12) is not relevant here as it proceeds in the presence of a revealed knowledge and within the parameters of a wisdom tradition. Do we commit a mistake when we attribute "rejection of the notions of wisdom, illumination and the Divine" to the Enlightenment paradigm? Is it only a reaction to the social side of the issue, the mixed bag of history that Modernity and, more resolutely, Postmodernity has manifested? As religions are worldviews or metanarratives— inclusive posits concerning the ultimate nature of things— its custodians cannot accept polemical Postmodernism's contention that on balance they oppress. We have observed that "the magic word of Modernity and of Postmodernity is society." Our present question bears on it, for it is almost entirely for their social repercussions that Postmoderns fault worldviews. In applying that measuring rod both Modernity and Postmodernity simply assume (they do not argue) that religion does more harm than good.[244] Whether this concern with society of Modernity and of

[244] That this runs counter to social science functionalism, which holds that institutions don't survive unless they serve social needs, is conveniently overlooked, but the deeper point is

Postmodernity is modern or instead modernly conceived, one can not be sure— the Stoics and Prophets were fairly good on the subject. But we cannot have enough of the concern itself.[245]

Basit continues: "This means that the circling of the square requires a rejection of the uncritical affirmation of tradition (or a particular school within tradition) just as the squaring of the circle requires a rejection of the blind negation of tradition by the zealots and the liberals" the Qur'anic critique of Islamic tradition for its failure to fully express key Islamic ideals in institutional form." (Basit, p. 17) This is a task which, according to my lights, is innate to the Islamic tradition, its principle of movement. Do we require a reference to the Enlightenment paradigm to be alerted to its importance? If that is the case and we need awakening calls there is no problem with it.

The section dealing with "the Qur'anic treatment of Judaism and Christianity as informing the rationale underpinning the squaring the circle" (Basit, p. 17 passim) is very illuminating and I can not agree more. I would offer only a few brief comments. Firstly, with reference to what has been said about the "shared ground" earlier it should be pointed out here that the critique/affirmation of Judaism and Christianity is the case of two sister wisdom traditions which share the common ground of wisdom, illumination and the Divine with Islam. In the case of Enlightenment no such sharing on principles seems to exist. Secondly his reading of the Qur'anic texts would not please a large number of his coreligionists who are prone to making an exclusivist reading of the inclusivist verses of the Qur'an. The danger of excluding those who can only open up to religious Other on the basis of upholding the normativity of one's own faith was vividly brought to light by the controversy over the book by the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks. The manner in which Dr. Sacks was compelled by senior theologians in his own community to retract certain sentences from his latest book, The Dignity of Difference[246] highlights well the intellectual challenge involved in reaching

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that the vertical dimension— the way religion feeds the human soul in its inwardness and solitude— gets little attention.

[245] For details see Huston Smith, "Postmodernism and the World's Religions", in this issue.

[246] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference— How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London & New York, 2002)

out to the Other without alienating one's own community. I pray that Basit is spared that fate.

Basit has emphasised the need for "a reasoned/rational critique of the Enlightenment rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine" (Basit, p. 17) and accused perennialism and traditionalism of the "most egregious offence" of insinuating that "the Enlightenment is an absolutely unique phenomenon in human history in the sense that it has only one side and that side points away from God" and has emphasized the "most pressing demands of the day to face this paradigm squarely and engage with it constructively." (Basit, p. 22) My assessment is rather different. It is not because I have deep sympathies or even affinities with some of them. I genuinely believe that the task of facing this paradigm squarely and producing "a reasoned/rational critique of the Enlightenment rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine" has been successfully done, to a large extant, by the authors of the same school.[247] Moreover, the "Perennialists" (Universalist is a better denominator!) are not the only ones who criticizes Modernity/ Enlightenment in this vein.[248] This is also the verdict "beyond-

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[247] To prove my point I invite the readers to have a look at a few of the following works. Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (New York: Harper and Row, 1975; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004; S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*; Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind,* Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000; Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters?* Harper and Row, 2002; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004 (as *Religion –Significance and Meaning in an Age of Disbelief*)*;* David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989; Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect*, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004. The Perennialists are, after all, not that bad either.

[248] The criticisms we have in mind are well represented by the books cited by Lawrence E. Sullivan in his masterly study, *Icanchus Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 884-85. What he says in the passage leading up to the suggested reading applies also to Western perceptions of Islam: "One of the great disservices to our understanding of South American religions [read: Islam] has been the perception of tribal peoples [read: Muslims) as slavishly dedicated to an unchanging order revealed in the images of myth and handed down unquestioned and unmodified from one generation to the next.

This attitude accompanies the evaluation of 'myth' as a banal and inane narrative. Tribal peoples (representing 'archaic' modes of thought) childishly cling to their myths, infantile fantasies, whereas mature contemporaries jettison myths with the passage of 'historical time'

Postmodern" or "reversionary Postmodernism" has passed on Modernity/Enlightenment paradigm. I will let David Ray Griffin make the point for me. David says, "Modernity paradigm, rather than being regarded as the norm for human society toward which all history has been aiming and into which all societies should be ushered— forcibly if necessary— is instead increasingly seen as an aberration. A new respect for the wisdom of traditional societies is growing as we realize that they have endured for thousands of years and that, by contrast, the existence of modern society for even another century seems doubtful. Likewise, Modernity as a worldview is less and less seen as The Final Truth, in comparison with which all divergent worldviews are automatically regarded as "superstitious." The modern worldview is increasingly relativized to the status of one among many, useful for some purposes, inadequate for others.[249]

With the "Perennialists" and their 'crime record' out of the way we can now turn to "The need for "a reasoned/rational critique of the Enlightenment rejection of wisdom, illumination and the Divine" (Basit, p. 17). S. H. Nasr, a prominent Perennialist, has time and again argued for the need emphasizing the rational approach and mode of engagement. "Today in the West, as well as in the Islamic world itself, there is an ever greater need to study both the principles and manifestations of Islam from its own authentic point of view and a manner comprehensible to contemporary man, or at least to one who possesses sufficient intelligence and good intentions. Moreover,

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and the entrance' into 'modernity.' It would be fascinating to study these and other justifications proffered for avoiding a serious encounter with the reality of myth [read: Islamic thought) and symbolic acts.... This is not the place to carry out a history of the 'modern' ideas of myth and religion. It is enough to suggest that the Western cultural imagination turned away when it encountered the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. Doubtless this inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities. The Enlightenment, the withdrawal of Western thinkers from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge, and its intellectual follow-up coined new symbolic currency. These terms brought new meanings and new self-definition to Western culture: 'consciousness/ unconsciousness,' 'primitive/civilized,' 'ethics/ mores,' 'law/ custom,' 'critical or reflective thought/ action.'

[249] David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. xi.

this needs to be achieved by using methods of analysis and description which are at once logical and in conformity with the Islamic perspective; for this latter places the highest value upon intelligence (*al-'aql*) and logic, which is inseparable from it, although of course the transcendent realities cannot be reduced to logical categories. This type of writing which can 'translate' Islamic teachings into a contemporary idiom without betraying it is very important not only for non-Muslims who wish to learn about Islam but most of all for young Muslims, who are now mainly products of modern educational systems."[250]

Demands of reason should be satisfied— both the Perennialists and the "beyond-Postmodernism" or "reversionary Postmodernism" agree, but where they part company is in defining reason and its role/function in creating "a reasoned/rational critique of the Enlightenment rejection..…" Huston Smith makes the point in the following remarks. "Whitehead's categories are demanding, but they *do* in the end fit into our three dimensional reason, from which it follows that to fit God into them is to position her inside our limited understanding. This translates into putting God in a cage. Religion must, to be sure, be intelligible in certain ways, but to try to make it *rationally* intelligible, fully so, is to sound its death knell. (In keeping with Perennialists generally, I draw a sharp distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* inasmuch as the latter operates intuitively and directly.) It is to squeeze the *pneuma*— a word usually translated as *spirit*, but etymologically deriving from *breath* or *air*— out of it, leaving us with what someone has called "flat-tire" theology. I realize that my rejection of Whitehead's "onto-logical principle" here will sound like mystery-mongering to process theologians, but, apart from the pejorative in the word mongering, I welcome the charge. *Vis-a-vis* most modern and postmodern theology, I side with Sir Thomas Browne, who complained in his *Religio Medici* that the religion he typically heard preached did not contain sufficient impossibilities, adding that

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[250] S. H. Nasr, "Introduction," *Islamic Life and Thought*, Unwin, London, 1976; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2001, pp. 161-176.

it is "no vulgar part of faith" to believe things not only above but contrary to reason and against the evidence proper to our senses."[251]

In the present context we are concerned with the preliminary stage of removing obstacles which make it difficult or impossible for the mind to understand. Intelligence has its rights, and these have not always been upheld by the representatives of religion. Agreed. The mental faculties need to be appeased and re-assured; and to this end religion has no option but to sacrifice certain half truths, not to speak of mere suppositions and conjectures, which in the past were considered as powerful motives for loving God 'with all thy soul and with all thy strength' and a lack of which lead the Enlightenment thinkers to the revolt mentioned so often in this paper.[252]

I am also troubled by the thought that if Enlightenment could be considered as "a post-traditional expression of monotheistic ideals" (Basit, p. 11) and "the Enlightenment offered a more rational and comprehensible description of human will, human freedom and human consciousness than was possible prior to it" (Basit, p. 25) What kept Providence waiting so long to actualize its ideals and that only through an instrument which ostensibly rejected "wisdom, illumination and the Divine"? Basit's assertion, according to my lights, needs a strict qualifier here. I would read it as "the Enlightenment reasserted a more rational and comprehensible description of human will, human freedom and human consciousness than was possible in its milieu." According to my lights, it would be more accurate to say that Enlightenment was a case similar to that of Islamic science which influenced the West and provided it with foundations for its scientific enterprise but had a different trajectory in the West and resulted in a

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[251] David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 81.

[252] St. Mark, XII, 30. In Deuteronomy VI, 5, to which this is a reference, the element 'mind' is not mentioned, which makes no fundamental difference since the mind is strictly speaking a psychic faculty, and is therefore implicit in the word 'soul'. In St. Matthew, XXII, 37, on the other hand, the element 'strength' is absent which again makes no difference inasmuch as physical energy and endurance are dominated by the will, which is also a psychic faculty.

very different ethos.[253] Deliberation on this aspect of the issue may give us insights about the two faces of the Enlightenment paradigm.

This entails that while correcting Enlightenment on its rejections and claims of autonomous reason and emphasizing the essential requirement of "vectored reason", legitimate demands of reason should also be upheld. This does not mean— we add by way of a word of caution— that consciousness should be reduced to rationality alone i.e. discursive thought[254] or reason severed from its transcendent noetic roots,[255] since, to borrow the words of Iqbal, "The Total reality.....has other ways of invading our consciousness"[256]; there are "non-rational modes of consciousness"[257]; "there is the possibility of unknown levels of consciousness"[258] and "there are potential types of consciousness[259] lying close to our normal consciousness".[260]

On the practical level we are dealing with a received body of thought and praxis which, despite the Postmodern critiques of its conceptual foundations, continues to hold its sway in many ways. By head count the West is still Modern. Not only that; Enlightenment, its "rejection of the notions of

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253 S. H. Nasr, O' Brian, (Eds.) "Islamic Science, Western Science— Common Heritage, Diverse Destinies" in *In Quest of the Sacred*, repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2001, pp. 161-176.

254 Which is, as if, a reflection of the Intellect on the mental plane.

255 In the words of Rumi, "*'aql i juz'i 'aql ra badnam kard", Mathnawi*, (ed. Nicholson) Vol. III, p. 31, line, 8. Also see Vol. II, p. 352, line, 11, Vol. I, p. 130, line, 4.

256 Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* Iqbal Academy Pakistan/Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989, p. 13.

257 *Ibid.* p. 14.

258 *Ibid.* p. 37.

259 *Ibid.* p. 146.

260 How do these "other ways of invasion "relate to poetry"? Iqbal tells us that the questions that call for an intellectual vision of reality for their answers are, "common to religion, philosophy and higher poetry". His complete statement reads as follows. "What is the character and general structure of the universe in which we live? Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe? How are we related to it? What place do we occupy in it, and what is the kind of conduct that befits the place we occupy? These are the questions that are common to religion, philosophy and higher poetry. But the kind of knowledge that poetic inspiration brings is essentially individual in its character; it is figurative, vague and indefinite. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* op. cit. p. 1.

wisdom, illumination and the Divine" and claims of autonomous reason, have perpetuated, in "reified/dogmatic assertions" (Basit, p. 27). We are dealing, not with Voltaire but, to use John Ralston Saul's term, with "Voltaire's bastards" responsible for dissolution of human values and the rejections mentioned above.[261]

Karen Armstrong has a very pertinent remark in her chapter on "Enlightenment" in *A History of God*. Concerning Voltaire she observed:[262]

> The philosophers of the Enlightenment did not reject the idea of God, however. They rejected the cruel God of the orthodox who threatened mankind with eternal fire. They rejected mysterious doctrines about him that were abhorrent to reason. But their belief in a Supreme Being remained intact. Voltaire built a chapel at Femey with the inscription 'Deo Erexit Voltaire' inscribed on the lintel and went so far as to suggest that if God had not existed it would have been necessary to invent him. In the *Philosophical Dictionary*, he had argued that faith in one god was more rational and natural to humanity than belief in numerous deities. Originally people living in isolated hamlets and communities had acknowledged that a single god had control of their destinies: polytheism was a later development. Science and rational philosophy both pointed to the existence of a Supreme Being: 'What conclusion can we draw from all this?' he asks at the end of his essay on 'Atheism' in the *Dictionary*. He replies:
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> *That atheism is a monstrous evil in those who govern; and also in learned men even if their lives are innocent, because from their studies they can affect those who hold office; and that, even if it is not as baleful as fanaticism, it is nearly always fatal to virtue. Above all, let me add that there are fewer atheists today than there have ever been, since*

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[261] For a powerful argument showing the intimate links between reason and the dissolution of human values in the modern world, see John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reasoning the West* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

[262] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God,* Mandarin, 1993, pp. 352.

philosophers have perceived that there is no vegetative being without germ, no germ without design etc.[263]

Voltaire equated atheism with the superstition and fanaticism that the philosophers were so anxious to eradicate. His problem was not God but the doctrines about him which offended against the sacred standard of reason.

The question of reason in the Enlightenment paradigm and its subsequent reification could be read in a different light too. Schuon has remarked:[264]

In speaking of the great theophanies— Beyond-Being, Being and Divine Centre of Existence, or Self, Lord and Logos-Intellect— mention has also been made of the human intellect (this being referable to the Logos), which is 'neither created nor uncreated': it is thus possible, if desired, to distinguish a fourth theophany, namely, the Logos reflected in the microcosm; this is the same Divine Logos, but manifesting itself 'inwardly' rather than 'outwardly'. If 'no man cometh unto the Father but by Me', this truth or this principle is equally applicable to the pure Intellect in ourselves: in the sapiential order— and it is only in this order that we may speak of Intellect or intellectuality without making implacable reservations— it is essential to submit all the powers of the soul to the pure Spirit, which is identified, but in a supra-formal and ontological manner, with the fundamental dogma of the Revelation.

Its degeneration is what is relevant to our present discussion. He says:[265]

When the Ancients saw wisdom and felicity in submission to reason, both human and cosmic, they were referring directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, to the one Intellect. The proof of this lies precisely in the fact that they linked reason to Universal Nature; *in practice many*

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263 *Philosophical Dictionary* (tr. T. Besterman) London, London, 1972, p. 57.

264 Frithjof Schuon, Dimensions of Islam, Unwin, 1969; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1985, p. 76.

265 Ibid.

committed the error of reducing this Nature to human reason,[266] after having reduced God to Nature. This double reduction is the very definition of Greco-Roman paganism, or of the Greco-Roman spirit in so far as it was pagan, and not Platonic; it may be added that only the Man-Logos or Revelation 'resuscitates' and gives full importance to reason,[267] and only an exact notion of the Absolutely Real and of its transcendence gives a meaning to Nature.

It is not difficult to see where does Enlightenment stand in this perspective and the way it has to be redeemed! "Beyond-Postmodernism" or "reversionary Postmodernism" would also like to see the Enlightenment paradigm humbled in many ways and it insists on "reason supplemented by vision."[268] Its vision statement could be summarised in Griffin. David Ray Griffin concludes his statement, in *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, with a prophetic call for a new, postmodern science that will support rather than oppose theology. It is a bracing summons, but it rides a crucial oversight. To the extent that science moves in the direction Griffin wants it to, it will relax its effort to control and will content itself with trying to describe, because most of the things Griffin wants it to add to its repertoire—the immaterial, qualities, final causes, freedom, downward and divine causation— cannot be manipulated. There is nothing wrong with describing, of course, or anything sacrosanct about control. Quite the contrary; the most valuable aspect of Heidegger's entire corpus is his analysis of the way Western civilization has drifted toward calculative reason and the disaster portended by that drift. The question is not whether we should correct this drift, as Griffin and Basit are both convinced we should; the question concerns division of labour and what Confucius called "the rectification of names." I see "reversionary Postmodernism" as still wedded to the modern conviction that science is the privileged mode of knowledge. If this conviction be true, it stands to reason that all knowing should enter its camp. And so "reversionary Postmodernism" would have it: "science . . . means knowledge," he Griffin us, so "even the modern boundary between science

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[266] Emphasis added.

[267] This is the essence of Basit's thesis in both of its negative and positive aspects.

[268] See note 13 above.

and theology will ... be overcome."[269] Basit parts company with the "reversionary Postmodernism" at this point as could be surmised from his argument developed in his fine comparative study of Ghazali and Ibn Rushd on the issue of reason and revelation.[270]

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On the question of "interpretation of the mythic Fall from Eden" (Basit, p. 22) it is difficult to see eye to eye with Basit. I do not see the Fall in the same light as presented here and my interpretation of Iqbal also departs from that of Basit. A few remarks would suffice at the moment. He says, "Fall…. also made human culture, goodness, and faith possible." (Basit, p. 23) Goodness is a different affair; but it made human culture and faith possible; faith by way of a compensation not an improvement. Qur'anic narrative is very clear that the Fall was a part of the Divine scheme and outward revelation necessitated in the wake of the Fall was not adequated to a higher state of consciousness, as Basit gives us to understand, but rather an adjustment to the needs of a fallen humanity. When the "vision is face to face"[271] there is no question of faith, naïve or otherwise. Expressions like "naiveté and lack of consciousness", "instinctive appetite [and we can say naïve faith]" hardly make any sense in that context. Moreover, Iqbal is not the first to have noted the two sides of the Fall. The "fortunate sin" (felix culpa) "brings with it the possibility of a qualitatively different human affirmation of the Divine" but not a qualitatively better affirmation. Insisting on that would tantamount to denying the state of perfection that all religious traditions have unanimously looked back to and ignoring every thing that is implied in the idea of the Centre and the Origin dominating all pre-Modern civilizations.

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[269] See David Ray Griffin and Huston Smith, *Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology*, State University of New York Press, 1989. p. 49.

[270] See Basit B. Koshal, "Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd and Islam's Sojourn into Modernity: A Comparative Analysis." *Islamic Studies*. Summer, 2004. Also see, S. H. Nasr, "Falsafey ka Mukhaalif Falasafi" (*Ghazzali— A Philosopher's Critique of Philosophy*), *Iqbaliyat*, IAP, 1987, p. 126, 128

[271] Bible I Cor. 13. 12.

The formal world being made up of dualities, the Intellect, once it has been projected by virtue of its 'fall' into material and psychic substances, is split into two poles, the one intellectual and the other existential; it is divided into intelligence and existence, into brain and body. In the Intellect, intelligence is existence, and inversely; distinction of aspects does not in itself imply a scission. Scission occurs only in the world of forms.[272]

A comparison of Iqbal's narrative of the Fall with Milton[273] would yield interesting insights here but that would carry us too far afield. I am pressed

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[272] Human life unfolds on three planes simultaneously, or rather, the *ego is* subject to three centres of attraction to which it responds in different ways, according to its own nature or value. We live at the same time in the body, the head and the heart, so that we may sometimes ask ourselves where the genuine is situated; in fact, the *ego,* properly speaking, the empirical 'I', has its sensory seat in the brain, but it gravitates towards the body and tends to identify itself with it, while the heart is symbolically the seat of the Self, of which we may be conscious or ignorant, but which is our true existential, intellectual, and so universal centre. It is, in a sense, the old triad *anima, animus, Spiritus,* with the difference however that *anima—the* 'spouse' of *animus—is* rather the vegetative and animal psychic entity than the body itself; but there is no clear line of demarcation here, since the body cannot be dissociated from its sensations, which in fact constitute our lower and de-centralized *ego,* with its downward drag and dispersive tendency.

The brain is to the body what the heart is to brain and body taken together. The body and the brain are as it were projected into the current of forms; the heart is as it were immersed in the immutability of Being. Body and brain are so to speak the heart exteriorized; their bipolarization is explained by the fact of their exteriorization.

[273] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God,* Mandarin, 1993, pp. 352. "Coercing people to believe in orthodox doctrines seemed particularly appalling to an age increasingly enamoured of liberty and freedom of conscience. The bloodbath unleashed by the Reformation and its aftermath seemed the final straw. Reason seemed the answer. Yet could a God drained of the mystery that had for centuries made him an effective religious value in other traditions appeal to the more imaginative and intuitive Christians? The Puritan poet John Milton (1608–74) was particularly disturbed by the Church's record of intolerance. A true man of his age, he had attempted, in his unpublished treatise On Christian Doctrine, to reform the Reformation and to work out a religious creed for himself that did not rely upon the beliefs and judgments of others. He was also doubtful about such traditional doctrines as the Trinity. Yet it is significant that the true hero of his masterpiece *Paradise Lost* is Satan rather than the God whose actions he intended to justify to man. Satan has many of the qualities of the new men of Europe: he defies authority, pits himself against the unknown and in his intrepid journeys from Hell, through Chaos to the newly-created earth, he becomes the first explorer. Milton's God, however, seems to bring out the inherent absurdity of Western

literalism. Without the mystical understanding of the Trinity, the position of the Son is highly ambiguous in the poem. It is by no means clear whether he is a second divine being or a creature similar to, though of higher status than, the angels. At all events, he and the Father arc two entirely separate beings who have to engage in lengthy conversations of deep tedium to find out each other's intentions, even though the Son is the acknowledged Word and Wisdom of the Father.

It is, however, Milton's treatment of God's foreknowledge of events on earth that makes his deity incredible. Since of necessity God already knows that Adam and Eve will fail— even before Satan has reached the earth— he has to engage in some pretty specious justification of his actions before the event. He would have no pleasure in enforced obedience, he explains to the Son, and he had given Adam and Eve the ability to withstand Satan. Therefore they could not, God argues defensively, justly accuse

Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate;

As if Predestination over-rul'd

Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree

Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed

Thir on revolt; not I: if I foreknew,

Fereknowledge had no influence on thir fault,

Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown .. .

I formed them free, and free they must remain,

Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change

Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordaind

Thir freedom; they themselves ordaind that fall.

Not only is it difficult to respect this shoddy thinking but God comes over as callous, self-righteous and entirely lacking in the compassion that his religion was supposed to inspire. Forcing God to speak and think like one of us in this way shows the inadequacies of such anthropomorphic and personalistic conception of the divine. There are too many contradictions for such a God to be either coherent or worthy of veneration.

The literal understanding of such doctrines as the omniscience of God will not work. Not only is Milton's God cold and legalistic, he is also grossly incompetent. In the last two books of *Paradise Lost*, God sends the Archangel Michael to console Adam for his sin by showing him how his descendants will be redeemed. The whole course of salvation history is revealed to Adam in a series of tableaux, with a cinnebtary by Michael: he sees the murder of Abel by Cain, the Flosland and Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, the call of Abrahem, the Exocus from Egypt and the giving of the Law on Sinai. The inad quay of the Torah, which oppressed God's unfortunate chosen people tar countries, is, Michael explains, a ploy to make them yearn for a more spiritual law. As this account of the future salvation of the world progresses— through the exploits of King David, the exile to Babylon, the birth of

to content myself with a quote which comes from a very different kind of book, *The Secret of Shakespeare.*[274]

> Shakespeare, unlike Milton, has no illusions about the scope of reason. He knew that since reason is limited to this world it is powerless to 'justify the ways of God'. Milton may have known this in theory, but in practice he was very much a son of the Renaissance, very deeply under the spell of humanism. Paradise Lost cannot be called an intellectual poem. Milton portrays the next world by sheer force of human imagination. His God the Father, like Michelangelo's, is fabricated in the image of man; and the purely logical arguments which he puts into the mouth of God to justify His ways inevitably fail to convince us. Now Shakespeare also seeks to justify the ways of God to man. That is, beyond doubt, the essence of his

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Christ and so forth— it occurs to the reader that there must have been an easier and more direct way to redeem mankind. The fact that this tortuous plan with its constant failures and false starts, is decreed in advance can only cast grave doubts on the intelligence of its Author. Milton's God can inspire little confidence. It must be significant that after *Paradise Lost* no other major English creative writer would attempt to describe' the supernatural world. There would be no more Spensers or Miltons. Henceforth the supernatural and the spiritual would become the domain of more marginal writers, such as George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis. Yet a God who cannot appeal to the imagination is in trouble.

At the very end of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve take their solitary way out of the Garden of Eden and into the world. In the West too, Christians were on the threshold of a more secular age, though they still adhered to belief in God. The new religion of reason would be known as Deism. It had no time for the imaginative disciplines of mysticism and mythology. It turned its back on the myth of revelation and on such traditional 'mysteries' as the Trinity, which had for so long held people in the thrall of superstition. Instead it declared allegiance to the impersonal 'Deus' which man could discover by his own efforts. Francois-Marie de Voltaire, the embodiment of the movement that would subsequently become known as the Enlightenment, defined this ideal religion in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764). It would, above all, be as simple as possible.

Would it not be that which taught much morality and very little dogma? that which tended to make men just without making them absurd? that which did not order one to believe in things that are impossible, contradictory, injurious to divinity, and panicious to mankind, and which dared not menace with eternal punishment anyone possessing common sense? Would it not be that which did not uphold its belief with executioners, and did not inundate the earth with blood on account of unintelligible sophism? . . . which taught only the worship of one god, justice, tolerance and humanity?

[274] Martin Lings, *The Secret of Shakespeare,* Quinta Essentia, England, 1996, p. 178.

> purpose in writing. But his justification is on an intellectual plane, where alone it is possible; and this brings us back to the theme of his plays, for the intellect is none other than the lost faculty of vision which is symbolized by the Holy Grail and by the Elixir of Life.

Here I would like to quote the leading Iqbal scholar of India, S. R. Farooqi, on the issue. Farooqi says:[275]

> Under no pressure to rationalize, Iqbal is not much preoccupied with the Fall. Even his famous observation in the "Reconstruction" that the fall is "man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream nature with a throb of causality in one's own being" leaves Satan entirely out of the reckoning and is borrowed from St. Augustine without much critical examination. Cleanth Brooks quotes from Augustine's City of God and states that "self consciousness" was the "knowledge conferred by the act of plucking and eating the fated apple". Iqbal makes use of this argument to further his thesis of self-awareness.

Looking at the issue of the Fall from a Sufi perspective illustrates how Islamic anthropology and psychology are rooted in the divine attributes. A primary goal of the Sufis, after all, is to assume the character traits of God, or to actualize the divine form in which human beings were created. All the discussion of the "stations" that must be traversed on the path to God refer to the character traits that need to be brought out from latency. The models of the perfected divine form are the prophets, and the father of all the prophets is Adam himself. All the perfections, virtuous qualities, and stations that have come to be realized by human beings were already present in Adam. Understanding Adam's story allows us to see how the mutuality of divine and human love brings about the full flowering of human possibility and actualizes God's goal in creating the universe.

Since God is infinite, the possible modes in which the knowledge of His names can be realized are also infinite. This means that it is not enough for

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[275] For a perceptive analysis of the subject see, S. R. Farooqi, "The Image of Satan in Iqbal and Milton".

the first human being to know God's names. Each of his children must also know the names in his or her own unique way. Only then can every potential of the original human disposition come to be actualized. One implication of this is that hell demands human existence in the world. Hell is nothing but a domain that is ruled almost exclusively by the names of wrath and severity, just as paradise is ruled by the names of mercy and gentleness. The fact that God is both All-merciful and Wrathful demands that both paradise and hell exist. Hence, Ahmad Sam'ani (died 1140) tells us, God addressed Adam as follows when He wanted to explain to him why He had to send him down out of paradise:276

> *Within the pot of your existence are shining jewels and jet-black stones. Hidden within the ocean of your makeup are pearls and potsherds. And as for Us, We have two houses: in one We spread out the dining-cloth of good-pleasure, entrusting it to [the angel] Ridwan. In the other We light up the fire of wrath, entrusting it to [the angel] Malik. If We were to let you stay in the Garden, Our attribute of severity would not be satisfied. So, leave this place and go down into the furnace of affliction and the crucible of distance. Then We will bring out into the open the deposits, artifacts, subtleties, and tasks that are concealed in your heart.*

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Basit concludes, "As a final word I'd like to explicitly articulate this logic. The logic underpinning both of the approaches offered above with respect to the ultimate goal of Islam in its encounter with the modern West is not to critique-condemn-replace but to redeem-reform-embrace."…… "In the final analysis if there is one unredeemable part of the Enlightenment tradition it is the fact that it allowed its critique of illumination, wisdom and the Divine turns into an outright rejection because of the reification of the critique….. To adopt the position that the Enlightenment tradition has to be abandoned in its entirety in response to its shortcomings is to exhibit the worst characteristics of that which one is critiquing and rejecting. This basically means that one has adopted the same attitude towards

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276 For a detailed account of the Sufi hermeneutics of the issue see W. C. Chittick, "The Fall of Adam", *Sufism— A Short Introduction,* One World, Oxford, 2000.

the Enlightenment paradigm that the Enlightenment paradigm had adopted towards traditional religion and classical philosophy. This is not only a modernist move in the most negative sense, but also one that is unlikely to bear fruit. A more sane approach "albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one" and one that is built on scripturally (Qur'anically) reasoned grounds is redeem-reform-embrace— an approach that will lead to enhanced understanding on the part of a troubled and alienated self, as a result of it critical but empathetic study of the alien other. (Basit, p. 26-28) While agreeing with him "to redeem-reform-embrace" I would offer the following remarks as my conclusion.

The view advocated by Basit could be termed as a Postmodernism, which in contrast to its deconstructive predecessor,[277] be called **constructive** ***or*** **revisionary.** ***It seeks to overcome the Modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews as such, but by constructing a Postmodern worldview through a revision of Modern premises and traditional concepts. This constructive or revisionary Postmodernism involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions. It rejects not science as such but only that scientism in which the data of the modern natural sciences are alone allowed to contribute to the construction of our worldview.***

The constructive activity of this type of postmodern thought is not limited to a revised worldview; it is equally concerned with a postmodern world that will support and be supported by the new worldview. A postmodern world will involve postmodern persons, with a postmodern spirituality, on the one hand, and a postmodern society, ultimately a postmodern global order, on the other. Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism,

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[277] Prone to assume that maps must be believed fanatically if they are to be believed at all, polemical Postmoderns condemn religions for fomenting disharmony. But it is useful here to refer back to a characteristic of post-modernity, which includes its being "paired with ethno-religious fundamentalism". Postmoderns over-look that pairing. They do not perceive the extent to which their styles of thought (with the dangers of relativism and nihilism they conceal) have produced fundamentalism; which fundamentalism is the breeding ground for the fanaticism and intolerance they rightly deplore.

anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from Modernity itself. It however, by contrast with **premodern,** ***emphasizes that the modern world has produced unparalleled advances that must not be lost in a general revulsion against its negative features.***[278]

This revisionary postmodernism is not only more adequate to our experience but also more genuinely Postmodern. It does not simply carry the premises of Modernity through to their logical conclusions, but criticizes and revises those premises. Through its return to organicism and its acceptance of nonsensory perception, it opens itself to the recovery of truths and values from various forms of Premodern thought and practice that had been dogmatically rejected by Modernity. This constructive, revisionary Postmodernism involves a creative synthesis of Modern and Premodern truths and values.

But to work out such a creative synthesis is a challenging task. I would conclude with three reminders. First, finding Enlightenment thought useful to Islamic thought does not mean following it blindly or swallowing it uncritically. Neither in intention nor in result are they Islamic thinkers. Second, the kind of appropriation Basit is proposing is possible just to the degree that various postmodern critical analyses are conceptually separable from the secular, atheistic contexts in which they are to be found. Finally, I hope that by now it is clear the very thin soup one finds in Postmodernism is not the only piety that one could call "postmodern". Rather, some postmodern critiques open the door for a kind of Islamic thought that is robustly theistic and quite specifically Islamic. Perhaps one of the most important Islamic uses to which secular Enlightenment/Postmodernism can

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[278] From the point of view of deconstructive postmodernists, this constructive postmodernism is still hopelessly wedded to outdated concepts, because it wishes to salvage a positive meaning not only for the notions of the human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence, which were central to modernity, but also for Premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature.

be put is to help contemporary Islamic thinkers sort the wheat from the tares in our own traditions. The Postmodern can lead back to the Premodern, or, more precisely, a critically appropriated Postmodernism can lead to a critical re-appropriation of Premodern resources.

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The characteristic features of this epoch very definitely correspond with the indications supplied from time immemorial by the traditional doctrines when describing the cyclic period of which it forms a part; and this will at the same time serve to show that what appears as anomalous and disorderly from a certain point of view is nevertheless a necessary element in a wider order and an inevitable consequence of the laws governing the development of all manifestation. However, let it be said forthwith, this is not a reason for consenting to submit passively to the confusion and obscurity which seem momentarily to be triumphing, for in such a case there would be nothing else to do but to remain silent; on the contrary, it is a reason for striving to the utmost to prepare the way of escape out of this "dark age ", for there are many signs that its end is approaching, if it be not immediately at hand. This eventuality also is in accordance with order, since equilibrium is the result of the simultaneous action of two contrary tendencies; if one or the other could entirely cease to function, equilibrium would never be restored and the world itself would disappear; but such a supposition cannot possibly be realized, for the two terms of an opposition have no meaning apart from one another, and whatever the appearances may be, one can rest assured that all partial and transitory disequilibrium's will finally contribute towards the realization of the total equilibrium itself.

ISLAM, "A PROPHETIC, DISSENTING WITNESS WITHIN THE REALITY OF THE MODERN WORLD": A RESPONSE TO BASIT KOSHUL

Yamine Mermer

Certainly, a conversation between western modernity and Islam[279] is desperately needed and the role of Muslims in evincing a conversation that is fruitful and benefitial to all is crucial. Muslims have first hand experience of western modernity whereas the West is quite uninformed about Islam. What is prevalent in the West, particularly among Western intellectuals of Islam is a general tendency to explore Islam not from 'within', but from its own vantage point. Thus, the view that argues that the West tends to project Islam as its inverse image, as professed by Edward Said is quite compelling in its general thrust. What the West has portrayed as Islam is often a rather distorted image of it. As Kinberley Patton and Benjamin Ray observe, in the context of western modernity, "to compare is to abstract, and abstraction is construed as a political act aimed at domination and annihilation; cross-cultural comparison becomes intrinsically imperialistic, obliterating the cultural matrix from which it "lifts" the compared object."[280] In this case at

[279] My understanding is that if we analyze Islam as a socio-cultural reality then consistency requires that the Enlightenment also be evaluated from a socio-cultural perspective. But if we treat Islam as a form and the Enlightnment as 'essential' than we will definitely run into unsolvable problems. It would particularly be misleading to consider the form of Islam from the perspective of modernity. We should also keep in mind that Muslims have been so much immersed in modernity— whether willingly or not— and they are often so ignorant of the Islamic tradition except as a modern socio-cultural phenomena that they are seldom aware of the challenge that the West poses for religious understanding in the metaphysical front. Finally, I believe that at an initial stage a socio-cultural analysis with all its complexities will not be very helpful in initiating a conversation. I will rather consider both Islam and the West at the ontological level. Yes we recognize a sickness at its symptoms but treatment is about identifying its underlying causes. Hence in order to address the cause of the sickness of modernity, we need to examine the ontological foundations behind its form.

[280] K. C. Patton, B.C. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in a Modern Age* (Berkely: UCP, 2000), 2.

least, the so-called 'universalism' of the West would be more appropriately described as imperialistic Westernization of the world. The very notion of religious pluralism in Europe was the result of increased exposure to evidence from the 'exotic' and/or 'primitive' societies under colonial rule. Charles Long notes that the history of the study of religion, which finds its roots in the rationalism and naturalism of the European Enlightnment, is the dramatic story of the violent reality experienced by people and cultures that were colonized by Europeans.[281]

This last point is significant. What went wrong with the enlightenment project? SR[282] practitioners are interested in answering such questions in order to identify the nature and origins of the problems of modernity, which they seek to address with aim of searching for remedies. The ideals of European Enlightnment, such as the diginity and freedom of human beings and their equality before the law, are truly 'sacred' principles but the problem is that they remained to a large extent only 'ideals.' At the socio-cultural level, the encounter of the West with the 'other' has often been one of oppression and despotic subjugation as the horrors of colonialism and two terrible World Wars attest. Where capitalism was not available for modernization, the state stepped in to realize it by totalitarian means. In "freeing" society from religion, the Machiavellian political philosophies of modernity legitimized absolute power. The two World Wars led to question the notion of science and technology as unmixed blessings, and the ecological crisis caused many to reconsider the Enlightnment's concept of progress. Likewise, totalitarianism pointed to a dark side of modernity; something in modernity's worldview - including its alleged concern for human life and well-being– was fundamentally flawed. For totalitarianism was a consequence of modernity itself. As Foucault has argued, without efficient technologies of surveillance, control, and extermination, despotism could not have developed into totalitarianism. I may have gone to extremes in highlighting the dark side of the 'enlightement'. However, this is dictated in part by the context and topic of our discussion: My aim behind this is to bring into relief the fact that the

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[281] C.H.Long, *Significatio*: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the interpretation of religion (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 1999), 3-4.

[282] SR stands for 'Scriptural Reasoning.'

'enlightenment' is not a 'given' of universal value and certainly not a universal historical 'fait accomplit.'

Basit Koshul mentions three ideals at the heart of the Enlightnment, a) the irreducible dignity of the human being, b) equality of all human beings before the law and c) the value/worth of the material / profane worlds. How much has the West established human dignity? What is human dignity if the subject has no value except as an instrument, if he is no more than an object, a stranger to himself and to his environment? One could argue that religion dignifies human beings more than secular laws. Were not these laws human to the extent they borrowed from traditional religion? France, a major advocate of the Enlightenment, acclaimed "liberte, egalite et fraternite" while massacring hundred thousands people in its colonies. Marshall Berman states that the very self-identity of the modern individual has become acutely problematical. The modern individual does not know who he is, "he knows only how to live outside himself, in the judgment of others: indeed, it is only from the judgment of others that he gains consciousness of his judgment of his very existence."[283] Have not sociology and religious studies defined the self as a set of roles 'performed' in the stage of social life? What is then the meaning of equality of men without genuine selves[284], and without purpose in life? According to Rousseau, philosophe of the Enlightnment, all individuals would "become equal, but only because they are nothing." [285] In addition, what is the value of the material world if it has no significance beyond itself?

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[283] Quoted in M. Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the emergence of Modern Society* (New york: Atheneum, 1970), 141.

[284] Modern institutions engineer their own settings of action, which act as a mechanism for the suppression of genuine identity. The more daily life is emptied of its traditional content and reconstituted in terms of modernity's own dynamics, the more individuals are induced to negotiate lifestyle choices among the options enforced on tehm. Conditions of modernity intrude deeply into the very heart of self-identity and personal feelings. They impose on individuals how to think, feel and behave, what to wer and what to eat and many other things. Erich Fromm expresses this conditioning as follows, "The individual ceases to be himself, he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns…this mechanism can be compared with the protective coloring some animals assume. They look so similar to their surroundings that they are hardly distinguishable from them." E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1960), 160.

[285] Quoted in Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 155.

For the pre-moderns, the world was not alien, it carried divine meaning; post-modernism however, predicts the end of hermeneutics.

In a fundamental sense, the crisis of modernity is a crisis of meaning: it rejects depth; it rejects signs because they refer to a transcendent realm and consequently it rejects the possibility of meaning. Nature is tamed and secularized so as to impede basic moral and existential concerns, which are considered as disturbing because the secular reason of the Enlightenment cannot answer them and because they may lead individuals to question the system itself. However, the desacralization of the world only serves to aggravate the situation. The organization of modern social conditions is such that they drown the individual into a routine of labor and consumption, which gives him the impression that his daily life is under control and is somehow predictable. In other words, the hope is that this routine will sustain a sense of ontological security. Yet, that very routine is often experienced as "empty" practices, which lack moral meaning. Personal meaninglessness and the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer dominate. This feeling of meanninglessness has haunted twentieth century intellectuals. Modernity "is caught up in an increasingly complete eradication of meaning." Logically, this would lead to the point when modernity itself loses meaning and abolishes itself so to speak: if everything is empty and worthless, then there is no sense in modernity either! This, in Nietzsche's words, is 'nihilism.'

Given the crisis of meaninglessness, how can Islam engage modernity in a meaningful way? Can Islam assess crittically modernity on the grounds of reason? From an SR perspective, the answer is not straightforward. Prof. Ochs says, "SSR appears to have arisen specifically in response to the great failing of Intelligence in the modern world. Our shared sense, in this Society, is that the dominant paradigms of reason both in the university and in our seminaries are deeply flawed."[286] I will argue that the secular reason of the Enlightenment is very far from being in harmony with the Qur'anic concept of reason; it constitutes more of an area of conflict than a commonality. We should keep in mind that an important result of the Enlightenment was the

[286] P.Ochs, "SSR: The Rules of Scriptural Reasoning," 1999 *Program for the NSSR,* April 1999, p.1. See http://www.depts.drew.edu/ssr/nationalssr/NSSR1999RulesSR.htm#top,

deification of reason at the expense of faith. Reason was elevated to the status of an absolute. This Promethean reason commanded skepticism toward religion (Christianity) primarily, but eventually, we could doubt everything except reason itself. In other words, reason became dogma. On what grounds did we accept reason accepted as ultimate arbiter, if not blind faith in reason itself? Anthony Giddens observes, "Modernity is not only unsettling because of the circularity of reason, but because the nature of that circularity is ultimately puzzling. How can we justify a commitment to reason in the name of reason?"

What can we say about Qur'anic reason? Koshul quotes the Qur'anic verse, "*Shame upon you and that which you worship besides God! Will you not, then, use your reason*? (21:67) According to the logic of this verse, reason is that which confirms that the worship of idols is groundless. Koshul cites verse 45:5 also:

> *And in the succession of night and day, and in the means of subsistence which God sends down from the skies, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the change of the winds: (in all this) there are signs (ayat) for people who use their reason.*

According to this verse, the use of reason concurs with perceiving the signs in the so-called natural phenomena. Put differently, to be inattentive to the signs is incompatible with the use of reason. Thus, it is clear that the Qur'anic notion of reason is quite different from the Enlightenment's reason. In fact, the dogma of the self-sufficient reason of the Enlightenment feeds on the dogma of 'meaning in itself.' [287] Once it is claimed that the meaning of things is in themseves only; that they do not point to anything beyond themselves; i.e. that they have no signative meaning, then reason can supposedly 'discover' that meaning. It becomes ostensibly 'self-sufficient' i.e. it does not need a criterion outside itself to have access to the meaning of things precisely because it has decided from the onset that they have no other meaning (or at least no other meaning that is worth finding out) other than what it itself has invented. In other words, such a 'hermeneutical

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[287] As Gadamer acknowledges, "hermeneutics has to see through the dogmatism of a meaning-in-itself in just the same way as critical philosophy has seen through the dogma of experience."Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (London: Sheet and Ward. 1988), 430.

understanding' moves inside a vicious circle. Within this paradigm, the individual does not understand things for what they are in reality but projects his own 'understanding' of them; as Gadamer says, "Understanding understands itself."[288] In other words, the interpreter makes up a "meaning." Thus, within this context 'meaning' is so relative (a modern substitute for 'arbitrary') that ultimately it is not very different from 'meaninglessness.' Methodologically, they end up having equivalent status, that is the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' appears as 'a process whereby reason turned into its opposite.' SR practitioners are inclined to see the disasters of modern Western society as the outcome of this 'awful dialectic.' "The purpose of SSR is, from the midst of modern thinking… to recover the practices of hearing God's speech that both preceded and still provide the terms for modern thinking." [289]

The Qur'an calls this reason, which equates meaning and meaninglessness *hawa*. The following verses highlights that the Qur'an is not unaware of this type of debate, and it underscores that the prophet was not encouraged to pursue it under confusing terms.

> *Say:"Produce, then, (another) revelation from God which would offer better guidance than either of these two (i.e.the Torah and the Qur'an) - and I shall follow it, if you speak the truth!" And since they cannot respond to your challenge, know that they are following only their hawa (their own likes and dislikes under the claim of following reason) and who could be more astray than he who follows his own likes and dislikes (hawa) without any guidance from God?* (28:49-50)

The Qur'an mentions the deification of *hawa,* and contrasts it to the use of reason. Immediately after, it mentions the signs of the multitude favors of the Maker towards man and concludes by noting his ingratitude, thus relating the deification of *hawa* to an ontological state of ingratitude:

> *Have you ever considered the one who makes his hawa (his own desires) his deity? Could you then be held responsible for him? Or do you think that most of them listen and use their reason? Nay, they are but like cattle-nay, they are even less conscious of*

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[288] H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 235.
[289] Ochs, "SSR: The Rules of Scriptural Reasoning," 2.

the right way! Are you not aware of your Sustainer –how He causes the shadow to lengthen (towards the night) when, Had He so wiled, He could indeed have made it stand still: but then, We have made the sun its guide; and then, We draw it in towards Ourselves with a gradual drawing in. And it is He who makes the night a garment for you, and (your) sleep a rest, and causes every (new) day to be a resurrection. And He it is who sends forth the winds as a glad tiding of His coming grace; and (thus too) We cause pure water to descend from the skies, so that We may bring dead land to life therby, and give to drink thereof to many (beings) of Our creation, beasts as well as humans. And indeed, many times We have repeated this unto men so that they might take it to heart: but most men refuse to be aught but ingrate. (2543-50)

The problem is how one can have access to the meaning of the external world without recourse to any source other than reason when the world is both external and alien according to that very reason. How can this reason make sure that its interpretation of the world is in conformity with the reality of the world, and not merely a distortion of the world? The need for a criterion is indispensable in the face of the pervasiveness of doubt, a distinctive feature of so-called critical reason, which permeates so many aspects of modern daily life, at least as background phenomena.[290] In absence of a universal criterion, all claims to understanding remain arbitrary for there would be no way to check whether interpretations of the world conform to to the reality. Unless it starts with self-examination, the relentless search for a critical perspective in the modern world is bound to remain unsuccessful. The challenge that always confronts the claim of understanding without reference to a universal criterion of reality outside itself is that it has no means to apprehend or capture the meaning of things. It is bound to see things through its prejudices. Gadamer explains that things have no meaning independently of the interpreter's prejudices. Meaning comes into being only through the happening of understanding.[291] It follows that the modern subject is enclosed in his own paradigms.He is forever prisoner of his

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[290] As modern secular science and philosophy could not ground knowledge, they insist that all knowledge is uncertain; it is always open to revision and at some point, it may even be abandoned. However, according to what is it abandoned? It is not clear. "Knoweldge" depends on the "methodological principle" of doubt! This issue is existentially disturbing to both the philosopher and the layman.

[291] H.G.Gadamer,"The Problem of Historical consciousness" in *Interpretative social Science: A Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow and W.M.Sullivan (Berkely: University of California Press, 1979), 159.

prejudices. He has no means to see the world except within his own 'horizon.' In Gadamer's view, "the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us,"[292] and that is supposedly evidence for the openness of the horizon. In fact, it is just the opposite: if my horizon moves with me, it means I cannot get out of it. From the point of the Qur'anic worldview, this 'hermeneutical emprisonment' is rooted in modernity's existential predicament. It is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of being, which is itself the result of the perception of the self *vis á vis* the world and vis a vis its own Maker.

The dogmas of modernity are rooted in a paradigm where everything is visualized as owning itself and existing of itself independently of its Maker (eventhough the existence of God may not be denied). This afflicted paradigm takes ontological awareness for granted; routine activities sustain it but cannot ground it: 'being' has meaning only as opposed to 'non-being;' one exists because he is not non-existent. In 'ordinary' circumstances, modern man feels relatively in control of his life; he knows what to do and how to act. His framework of security is based on the feeling that things around him are real and permanent but its lacks any ontological foundations and hence it is extremely fragile. When routines are disturbed, existential crises are likely to occur. At such moments, moral and existential questions present themselves in pressingly. He is forced to confront concerns, which otherwise are kept away from consciousness with the smooth working of daily activities. At such moments, modern man comes face to face with reality: he realizes that in fact nothing is under his control, nothing is essential to him, not even his own existence. In other words, he realizes that the 'rationality' of modernity is baseless and unjustifiable; it contradicts the ontological reality of the world.

The modern individual may experience his ontological reality as dreadful to the extent he has been existentially secluded from the moral and spiritual resources needed for him to find out the meaning of life. He may choose to escape it and avoid rethinking fundamental aspects of his existence. Indeed, without answers, the threat of personal meaninglessness becomes a source of unspecific and pervasive anxieties. For our answers to existential questions

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[292] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271.

constitute our framework of reality without which we cannot answer even the simplest query. Without such framework of reality, modern man needs constantly to keep himself busy in order to 'put aside' the strong feelings of anxiety arising from his unanswered questions. However, whenever 'things go wrong' and he is compelled to confront the fictive character of his world, his sense of security is likely to come under immediate strain. If such an individual comes face to face with death for instance, he is likely to experience shock. Death seems unintelligible to him because it contradicts his taken –for-granted view on existence. Death reminds him that contrary to what modern society assumes, existence is not intrinsic to him, it is not under his control. That is death reminds him that he is ontologically unsecure. An individual in this position is always on the brink of a crisis of meaning. He perceives everything that reminds him his transience (and everything is transient) as a threat, because it reminds him of the meaninglessness of his life; it reminds him that he lacks that point of support that human consciousness yearns for. As Helen Lynd says, "We have become strangers in a world where we thought we were at home. We experience anxiety in becoming aware that we cannot trust our answers to the questions, "who am I?", "Where do I belong?" …with every recurrent violation of trust we become again children unsure of ourselves in an aalien world."[293]

To be ontologically secure is to possess well-founded answers to fundamental existential questions, questions that deal with our sense of self, our aims, our values, etc. In pursuing answers, values, we are inescapably confronted with problem of meaning, with the issue of what life is all about. Ultimately, we are faced with questions, which we need to answer in order to acquire an ontological understanding of reality and of self-identity: who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? In the view of Charles Taylor, "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we became, and of where we are going."[294] Self-knoweldge is important because it is the point of reference for knowledge of the 'Other.' How can one claim to know the world when he does know his own self? Similarly,

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[293] H.M.Lynd, *Shame and the search for Identity* (London: Routledge, 1958), 46-47.

[294] C.Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4

according to what can reason be self-sufficient when it is ontologically contingent and limited?

Given the dogmatism of 'critical reason,' it would make no sense that Islam affirms this dogma. Quite the opposite, Islam needs to engage modernity, and confront its dogmas. In particular, it needs to question self-sufficient reason with the hope of 'reconstituting the practices of modern Intelligence as practices of reflecting on the rules of scriptural reasoning,'[295] for there is not much possiblity for modernity to reform itself if it does not wake up to the irrationality and circularity of its dogmatic Promethean reason. Moreover, the Islamic spirit of wisdom and mercy requires that the deconstruction of modern reason should include the seeds of restitution. At this point, I should call to attention that the dogmas of modernity are the dogmas of the Muslims too, in as much as they are part of modernity and modernity is part of their reality and thus the 'squaring of the circle' needs to proceed in the manner of the 'circling of the square.' As A. Murad has elegantly put it, Islam can play the crucial role of "a prophetic, dissenting witness ***within*** the reality of the modern world."[296]

Basit koshul rightly points out that the possibility of a meaningful dissenting voice within the modern world requires that the dissenting voice shares some common ground with the modern world. He argues, with reason, that the common ground cannot be religion; I will add that it cannot be dogmatic reason either. Islam need not "show consideration for the Enlightenment enshrinement of reason." Its task is rather to debunk this very 'rationality,' using a language that it understands but certainly not its categories, for the secular reason of the Enlighenment is at the root of the problems of modernity and its antagonistic attitude towards the Divine. If we conceded to this reason, not only would we fall in clear contradiction with our project of scriptural reasoning, but also we would not find the means to start a meaningful conversation, we would only perpetuate the confusion of the modern world. As I have previously stated, this Promothean reason is in conflict with the intellect or the faculty of reasoning mentioned in the

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[295] Ochs, "SSR: The Rules of Scriptural Reasoning," 2.

[296] Murad, A. (2002) "Faith in the Future: Islam After the Enlightenment" at http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/postEnlight.htm

Qur'an. From the point of view of Qur'anic logic, a 'rationality' that disparages revelation is simply irrational because unaided reason cannot hope to solve the problems of life without help from the Granter of life. As The Qur'an expounds it:

> *Is man, then, not aware that it is We who create him out of a (mere) drop of sperm, whereupon he becomes an open contender in argument!* (36:77 See also16:4) Concerning those who deny the fact of divine revelation, the Qur'an says, *Is it their minds that bid them (to take) this (attitude) or are they simply people filled with overweening arrogance? Or do they say, "He himself has composed this (message)? Nay but they are not willing to believe! But then (if they deem it the work of a mere mortal) let them produce another discourse like it, if what they say be true! Have they themselves been created without anything (that might cause their creation)? Or were they perchance, their own creators? And have they created the heavens and the earth? Nay, but they have no certainty of anything!* (52:32-36).

The Qur'an challenges the addressee, but in doing so, it asks questions that help him check himself if he is ready to 'listen;' it teaches him to ask the right questions and the way to the answers. The Qur'an shows the circularity and absurdity of a 'reason that is not grounded in ontological reality.' From this aspect, the Qur'an is a source of both wisdom and mercy. It constantly says that there are signs in everything and it points to those signs in many ways,

> *Let man, then, observe out of what he has been created.* (86:5)

> *And now ask those (who deny the truth) to enlighten you: were they more difficult to create than all those (untold marvels) that we have created? For behold, We have created them out of (mere) clay commingled with water.* (37:11)

> *It is We who created you, why then, do you not accept the truth? Have you ever considered that which you emit? Is it you who create it or are We the Creator? We have indeed decreed that death shal be (ever-present) among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being anew in a manner (as yet) unkown to you. And (since) you are indeed aware of* the *(miracle of your) coming into being in the first instance, why, then, do you not bethink yourselves? Have you ever considered the seed which you cast into the soil? Is it you*

cause it to grow, or are We the cause of its growth? (For), were it to Our will, We could indeed turn into chaff, and you would be left to wonder (and lament)….Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds, or are We the cause of its coming down? It comes down sweet but were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why then, do you not give thanks? Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel, or are We the cause of its coming into being/ It is We who have made it a means to remind (you of Us), and a confort for all who are lost and hungry inn the wilderness (of their lives). Extol then, the limitless glory of your sustainer's mighty name! (56:57-74)

The Qur'an puts the answers in the mouth of the prophet Abraham (peace be upon him), who is also refered to as a model for the believers,[297]

(*Abraham) said, have you, then, ever considered what it is that you have been worshipping you and those forbears of yours? Now (as for me, I know that) verily, these (false deities) are my enemies, (and that noneis my helper) save the Sustainer of all worlds, who has created me and is the One who guides me, and when I fall ill, is the One who restores meto health, and who wil cause to die and then will bring me back to life, and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on Judgment Day!* (26:75-82)

Yes, we need to start from a common ground and we actually do share a common ground. But it is imperative to realize that the conversation is not with modernity or the enlightenment as ideologies but with modernity as a condition that includes all of us; our addressees are people shaped by modernity like us. Moreover, all people share the *fitra* (innate nature). The Muslim scholar al-Ghazali (d.1111) observed that the term 'intellect' (*'aql*) refers to an innate (*bi al-tab'*) intellect and to an acquired (*bi al-iktisab*) intellect. He explains that "the first, namely the innate (*matbu'*) intellect, was intended by the Prophet when he said,"God has not created a more honored thing than the intellect (*'aql*)." The second, namely the acquired intellect, was intended by the prophet when he said, "When you draw near unto God

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[297] *Indeed, you have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said unto their idolatrous people: "Verily, we are quit of you and of all that you worship instead of God:we deny the truth of whateer you believe; and between us and you there has arisen enmity and hatered, to last until such a time as you come to believe in the One God!* (60:4)

through righteousness and good works, you draw near unto Him through your learning." [298] It is the first innate intellect that all humans share and it is from there that the conversation can start. Islam is actually in a unique position to launch such a conversation for the Qur'an addresses this innate intellect, and it draws its evidence from the physical world, which we also all share. It restores man his dignity as the addressee and guest of the Divine, and reinstate the world its significative value by disclosing the sign- nature of everything. Moreover, by addressing all humanity[299] in a way all understand, the Qur'anic message declares the equality of all before the divine law of mercy and wisdom. From the vantage point that the Qur'an provides, we can see that the secular rationality of modernity is ontologically untenable. This will prepare the stage for us to appreciate that a scriptural basis can give a 'rational' account of what the reason of Enlightenment has attempted to explain. We should note though that 'rational' here means not only cogent, sound reasoning and logic but more importantly that which is in accordance with the *fitra* (human nature) and human beings most ultimate and essential concerns such as the meaning of death, final destiny, etc.[300]

The role of the 'prophetic, dissenting voice' has two main dimensions: wisdom and mercy. Wisdom because the prophetic witness needs to question the prejudices and claims of the existing dominant paradigm in order to establish the validity of the divine message. In doing so, he appeals to the 'innate intellect' of his addressees and cultivates it into a 'scripturally acquired intellect', an *intellectus fidei* (or '*aql imani*). In this sense, we can say that "the prophetic witness offers a revelatory affirmation of some of the real but dormant aspirations and potentialities at the very heart of its socio-cultural environment, whose emergence and maturation is being forestalled by neglect and forgetfulness." (Basit, p. 9) However, the prophetic witness does not speak in terms of the existing dominant paradigm. The prophet typically questions the prevalent social values and feels deeply dissatisfied with them.

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[298] Al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge*, Trans. N.A. Faris (Lahore: Ashraf press, 1962), 228.

[299] Just as the Qur'an is a universal address to all humanity, The Prophet of Islam too said, 'Every prophet was sent to his own people; but I am sent to all mankind' (*bu'ithtu li'l-nasi kaffa*).

[300] In the Qur'an the intellect is mentioned (in the verbal form) as a function of the heart, i.e. the seat of feelings and emotions, *Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts reason and gain wisdom*?(22:46)

Next, he makes *hijra* (migration, self-separation from one's fellows); that is he feels very deeply the inadequacy of the prejudices and claims which stem from the dominant existing paradigm, he rejects them as inconsistent and false but does not claim that he has the answers. In the Qur'an, Abraham says, *Verily, I shall (leave this land) and go wherever my sustainer will guide*! (*inn*i *dhahibun ila rabbi sayahdin* 37:99). He is like saying to his people, "I do not *know* yet, but I am sure that the beginning is to leave you and that which you worship." The prophet trusts in God and submits to Him and this assuredly an essential element of the practice of hearing God's speech. As he realizes his need for help from an external source, he becomes receptive to the divine speech, which he confirms and believes in.

Then he returns to his people to heal them with compassion and the society with the teaching of wisdom. He invites his people to "migrate unto God," and strive in His way: *Verily, they who have attained to faith, and they who migrate unto God, and are stiving hard in God's cause- these it is who may look forward to God'a grace: for God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace*. (2:218; see also 8:74) He does not compromise the content of the message but looks for compassionate ways of delivering it. He returns out of mercy but he returns as 'a dissentic prophetic voice from within'. The scripture teaches that, "*They would love to see you deny the truth even as they have denied it, so that you should be like them. Do not, therefore, take them for allies until they migrate unto God for the sake of God.*" (4: 88) At this point, looking back into history, it may be said that the failure of Muslims was not because Islam didn't "complete rationalization and integration of the resources in the Enlightenment ideals into relevant institutions" (Basit, p. 16-17) but because they didn't find the resources to confront modernity and deliver the message of Islam. The very notion of "institutionalizing" values belongs in modernity. "Institutionalization" is not only about the establishment of values but also about monopolizing them using those values to legitimize any activity; hence it opens up the possibility of exercising oppression and domination under the mask of liberation**.** In Islam, values are embodied; they are lived, experienced and practiced. They are not mere 'ideals' but ontological realities. In fact, it is precisely because Islam 'failed' to adapt itself to the Enlightenment, that it has preserved its purity; a feature that puts it in a unique position vis a vis the plight of modernity. If we are going to break the circularity of modernity and come up with solutions, we need to realize that conversation is not about adjusting the

message to modernity but about how we could make those resources of wisdom, compassion, and healing available to those who need them and seek them. This 'failure' might be a means for the preservation of the traditional worldview until it finds its aspiration again. This 'failure' is perhaps what protected Islam from the fate of Christianity and Judaism, which were disemboweled and made into 'modern liberal religions' in the service of a secular modernity. "They became shallow reflections of enlightenment ideals and supplied superficial prooftexts to legitimate and not challenge the new modern economic, political, social, and cultural order. " (S. Kepnes, last page)

My reading of the story of the fall as it occurs in the Qur'an begins with an important factor, which koshul's narrative did not pick up. He correctly asserts that the fall is not "some catastrophic tragedy in some absolute ontological sense;" (Koshul, p. 25) the fall with its possibility of freedom made goodness and faith possible. However, there are two conditions for the fall to be transformed into goodness. First, one has to be aware of the state of fall, but this is not sufficient, it is essential that the individual be penitent, that he repents and asks for forgiveness. The Qur'an relates that after they had disobeyed and tasted the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve could not sense their fall and thus could not find the way out of it until God brought it to their attention, inspiring them with the prayer of *tawbah* (repentance),

> *The two replied, "Our sustainer! We have sinned against ourselves and unless you grant us forgiveness and bestow your mercy upon us, we shall most certainly be lost!"* (7:23)

Prior to their repentance, the Qur'an narrates how God revealed to Adam his 'predicament', his powerlesness vis-à-vis this predicament, and inspired 'some words of prayer to say to that effect. This point is crucial: even the awareness of the fall is divinely inspired! The Qur'an says that after the fall,

> *Adam learned from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. We said: "Get down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein.* (2:37-39)

According to the Qur'anic narrative, Adam's "transgression was forgiven" but on condition of accepting the guidance from God and following it. If man does not realize his state of fall and does not repent and give up the arrogance of self-sufficiency, how can he find his way out? The fall is not ontologically evil; it is a source of good but under which conditions? As Iqbal says, "The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flashes of self-consciousness," (quoted in Basit, p. 25) But from a scriptural reasoning point of view, this is only possible with the help and guidance of revelation. Certainly, the Qur'anic narrative opens up possibilities for self-enhancement because of man's predicament. However, it is unlike the existentialist argument, which is based on the axiomatic: as man falls, he awakens. It is not obvious that man knows that he is falling and the danger is that he may not awake at all. I reiterate that it is the compassionate critique of self-sufficient reason under the guidance of the scriptures that can clear the heedlessness dormant in its operation and consequently bring about awakening and healing. SR is in a sense the representative of the dissenting prophetic voice from within. It follows the example of Adam in that it wants to go back to the scriptures to listen out for God's guidance in order to find out a solution to our predicament, which is not peculiar to modernity as the story of the fall of Adam indicates; it is a basic human condition.

Modern man needs to realize that he is falling. He need to falsify logically and ontologically the claim of the Promethean reason. When that is done the *fitra* (human nature) will seek a point of support. It is will be brought to a state of listening to revelation because it reaches the state of searching for a source outside itself, namely the *ghayb* (the unseen transcendent). To see degeneration and criticize it as so is not sufficient. One needs to repent. Adam and Eve were forgiven because as soon as they were prompted to realize their fall they repented. Their awareness of their fall is not to be confused with secular existentialism. To critique modernity and condemn some of it ills is not evidence for the awakening from the fall. One could well criticize modernity superficially i.e. without questioning its ontological basis. For instance, Rousseau saw the degeneration as a fact, which for him was an existential predicament, but he attempted to solve it without having recourse to the notion of the fall, which inherently points towards a transcendent origin. His 'solution' was neither theological nor metaphysical: it was

modern. He accepted degeneration (the fall of man) but attributed it neither to man himself nor to God. He invented a new agent of degeneration: society. Hence, social contract was the source of salvation. "The meaning of life was in social justice." But how could justice be established if there was no ontological ground for morality? Freud described the rational Ego as "an island floating on a sea of irrationality," while professing rationalism. With Freud, reason, that single principle behind the organization of personal and collective life, came to be identified as an element of the human psyche, something not so rational; but whatever the name, man was still self-sufficient. In none of these cases, the critique is followed by repentance because these philosophers did not accept that man was falling away from his divine origin; it is just an 'existential fall' if we may say. They attempted to come with a solution from themselves, thus perpetuating that Promethean state so characteristic of the fall. "In fact one may argue that the logic of existentialism is not much unlike Cartesian logic in that in the end it does not rid itself of 'self-sufficient reason; for while the latter's famous dictum is " I think therefore I am", the former seems to say: " I am falling therefore I exist""[301]

No doubt, we may certainly view the present cultural and intellectual conditions as good omens for renewal (*tajdid*) but it is incumbent on seeing the Enlightenment for what it is, i.e. an un-enlightened go at the prospects! It is true that the open possibilities cannot be pursued by following the examples of the traditional schools of philosophy, which have short-circuited the very 'reason' they have to engage. Similarly, they cannot be pursued by simply accepting that the Enlightenment has an inherently good side to it. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, makes it clear that although abstract rational enquiry made it look as though it may be possible to reconciliate secular reason with scriptural wisdom, "the social and political upheaval that shook history and undermined society with a schoking effect on humanity refuted the possibility of such combination. "[302] According to Nursi, the fact that "the Enlightenment's stance towards non-Enlightenment paradigms is one of critique-condemn-replace" is not a fortuitous result. This attitude, he asserts,

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[301] R. Ameur, personal discussion.

[302] T. Abdel Rahman, "The Separation of Human Philosophy from the wisdom of the Qur'an" in *Islam at the Crosroads*, ed. I. M. Abu rabi (Albany: SUNY, 2003), 201-202.

is the logical concomitant of its philosophy. Nursi's conclusion is the result of an analysis of the very essentials of the Enlightenment, both logically and ontologically. The fact that the modern predicament of mankind contains the seeds of great goodness is momentous. To realize this possibility, the mission of the Qur'an is to confront, engage, compel and debunk not only the rationality of the Enlightenment, but also its sources of knowledge, which are wanting in relation to the project it whishes to implement. Koshul proposes a "redeem, reform, embrace" approach to the Enlightenment, perhaps to remain in a Qur'anicaly reasoned context, we might suggest a comdemn/redeem, critique/reform, replace/embrace at the same time for one can summon all the courage there is but never know in which context he is, within or without?

BEYOND LOGICS OF PRESERVATION AND BURIAL:

THE DISPLAY OF DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY OF TRADITIONS IN SCRIPTURAL REASONING

Nicholas Adams

Basit Koshul and Steve Kepnes have performed a wonderful service for us. Basit Koshul has argued not only that Islam 'squares the circle' (Murad) by being a vital dissenting voice within modern cultures, but also that scriptural reasoning may be a fruitful means of accomplishing this. One important task for me in this response is to show that non-Muslims are sufficiently attentive to this friendly dissent: an unheard voice is not an effective form of criticism, and circles remain unsquared. I shall make some remarks about this at the end. My more immediate, and very pleasurable, task is to respond directly to Steve Kepnes' paper.

Steve Kepnes has tried to show us how a Jew *understands* Islam. There are three things which he has not done, and I want to draw attention to these.

(1) Steve Kepnes has not tried to find a Western expert on Islam to tell him what Islam is. Ours is an age of hopeless generalisation, where *experts* appear at a moment's notice and pronounce about the *essence* of some phenomenon. It is possible, in today's universities, to be an *expert on Islam*. It is possible, in today's public sphere, to find people who will tell us *what Islam is*. But that is not what Steve Kepnes has done at all. He offers no overview of Islam; he makes no recourse to 'the facts', and he cites no Western ethnographies of Islamic culture. He has not sought to 'place' Islam in a theoretical context determined by non-Islamic political interests.

(2) Steve Kepnes has not tried to find a Muslim expert on Islam to tell him what Islam is. Ours is an age of tact and sensitivity, where we 'find space' for the other to speak for him- or herself, while we secretly make our own judgements but of course are not so crass as to articulate these in public. Steve Kepnes could have tried to find a Muslim expert behind whom he

could safely and respectably conceal his own understanding of Islam. He did not.

It is a mark of our cultural confusion that our age is marked both by hopeless generalisation, where concepts forged by the strong are imposed on the weak, and by tact and sensitivity, where judgements are indefinitely postponed, or made in a sinister fashion behind closed doors.

(3) Steve Kepnes has not tried to read a Muslim text and then say what he thinks of it. Ours is an age of 'the power of the reader'. No texts are forbidden to us; we have access to them all, so it seems, and our interpretations have infinite validity 'for us'. We are entitled to pick up any text from any time and to ventilate our 'response' to it. He has not tried, in this sense, to *understand* a Muslim text. Instead, he has read a Jewish text. He has tried to understand *that*.

Now, *understanding* is best pursued through conversation: through offers made, through offers accepted, through offer refused, and through offers transformed into new offers. Steve Kepnes has begun his act of understanding by making an offer: in this case, he *offers* a reading of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21.

Setting his face against a culture of generalisation, Steve Kepnes has offered a highly particular understanding of Islam. Setting his face against a culture of tact and sensitivity, Steve Kepnes has indeed made public judgements about Islam. Setting his face against the infinite power of the reader, Steve Kepnes has responded to texts that belong to his own tradition, and has allowed his interpretation of those texts to be disciplined by other readings in that same tradition.

This is all radical stuff: and it emerges just because Steve Kepnes has chosen to read a small part of Jewish scripture: a small part of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21.

His reasons for doing so are obvious: the Jewish texts appear to be, in his words, 'fairly negative about these figures'. The text thus appears, in an everyday kind of way, as a problem. And this thus raises a danger: for a Jew

to reflect on Hagar and Ishmael from within Jewish scripture may turn out to be to start with negativity, and to provide yet more negativity in the interpretation of these texts. Steve Kepnes starts with a problem.

The situation which brings us all together is marked by precisely this problem. Our traditions are beset with practices of speech and political action which are 'fairly negative' about each other. To put it mildly! Our newspapers and pamphlets, our politicians and their researchers, our talk in cafés and bars: trouble is not just brewing. It has already begun. In my home country a law has just been passed that allows the Government to lock up British nationals without any evidence and without charging them with any crime. Pretty much 100% of these nationals are going to be Muslims. British Muslims can now be seen, in the eyes of the law, as an 'internal threat' to national security, before they have committed any crime, and before evidence is presented that shows they are about to commit a crime. Some of our Christian bishops spoke out against this legislation, to their credit, but they were not heeded. Muslims appear quite a lot in our national press, and I can tell you that the reporting is 'fairly negative about these figures'.

Genesis 16 is a kind of sign of our situation, and I think it is for this reason that Steve Kepnes has chosen that text. His method is to try to offer a reading of the text which acknowledges the problem and tries to repair it.

Instead of reading Genesis 16 and 21 in a way that minimises the problem, Steve Kepnes in some ways allows it to be exaggerated: Hagar *really is* the stranger; she is *emphatically* Egyptian. Yet, drawing on Frymer-Kensky, we are enabled to see that Hagar prefigures not just Israel's suffering in Egypt but Israel's redemption. Hagar, the mother of Islam, is also a type of Israel: one who receives the Lord's blessing in perpetuity. Going beyond Frymer-Kensky, Hagar is the only one— man or woman— who names God; going even further— by analogy with Rashi's description of Abraham, Hagar is one who makes known the revelation of God. Steve Kepnes daringly places Hagar as a 'counterpart' to Abraham as 'evangelist of the one God'.

Steve Kepnes' reading gives us Hagar as one who is emphatically *other* to Israel: she is the mother of Ishmael, the one who is given bread and water and sent away, the one who provides one of the wives for Esau, and whose

history is an alternative history: an *other history* to that of Israel. But she is also identified *as Israel*: in the blessing she receives from the Lord; in her prefigurement of the enslavement and redemption of Israel in Egypt; she is also, in Steve Kepnes' reading, *like* Abraham, as one who makes public the revelation of God.

The thing I notice here is how there is no question of playing down the otherness. There is no attempt to integrate Sarah's maternity and Hagar's maternity into *one history*. There remain two *histories*, or even three, as Genesis presents the contrasting lines of Isaac and Ishmael, and then the contrasting lines of Jacob and Esau. Neither is there an attempt to play down the identity: Hagar is not merely like *Sarah*. She is like *Abraham*. Her children are not merely *like* Sarah's: Hagar's very self is a type of Israel as the bearer of blessing, and a sign of suffering and redemption.

This daring interpretation is taken to a quite new level when Steve Kepnes suggests that just as the 'other' of Hagar and Ishmael is preserved in Genesis' narrative, so the 'other' of Judaism is preserved in Christian narrative. Just as Genesis includes the genealogy of Hagar, narrates Abraham's burial by his *two* sons, and records Isaac's settlement at Beer-la-hai-roi, so the New Testament preserves the Jews as bearers of the law, and Christian communities preserve the Tanakh (albeit now as *Old Testament*). Steve Kepnes recognises that there are problems with this, and sees at work in Christian theology a complex hermeneutic.

If I understand Steve Kepnes right, the crucial point is the preservation of one narrative within another: just as Genesis lists the offspring of Hagar, and keeps their names alive, so Christianity preserves the Tanakh as Old Testament, and 'keeps' the law in some sense; and so Islam…

…but here I want to venture a friendly disagreement. The logic of preservation which Steve Kepnes sets next to Peter Ochs' logic of dialogue, means paying attention to *who* is doing the preserving. I wonder if Steve Kepnes has in a way too *anxiously* anticipated what Christians are doing with the Tanakh, or too *hastily* cited ayat 62, 145 and 136 from Sura 2, and the opening ayat from Sura 3. For me, Steve Kepnes' reading of Genesis 16, 21, 25, should *evoke* a corresponding reading of New Testament texts from

Christians, and corresponding readings of Qur'anic texts from Muslims. I wonder if *Steve Kepnes* should be doing all the work for us here? But maybe it isn't anxiety or hastiness but rather enthusiasm, and an experience of trust that these readings *will be evoked*, and that this entitles Steve Kepnes to speak on our behalves with the joy of knowing that we do, indeed, say these things.

I mention this, because I think those who may be curious about scriptural reasoning may be surprised by the swiftness and confidence of Steve Kepnes' moves outward from Genesis to the New Testament and to the Qur'an. This is not something guaranteed in advance: it is a task and a responsibility that is undertaken by members of each tradition. Steve Kepnes has generously refrained from offering any scripture from the New Testament, and so I want to offer the first beginnings of such an offer.

The most obvious place to do this would be through a reading of Romans 3 and 4. These deal with the relationship between Judaism, the law, and faith. The texts are long and complex, however, and this is just a little response. I will focus, then, on part of Romans 4

> ***For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness (Rom 4: 3-5)***

Paul here is a wonderful example of the logic of preservation. He 'preserves' Genesis 15.6. Let us turn to that text:

> ***And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendents be." And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:5-6)***

It is appropriate that Romans 4 should be evoked by Steve Kepnes' reading of Genesis 15, 21, 25: it is another passage narrating God's blessing. The moment of Torah which Paul 'preserves' is not just of Abraham's faith, but of Abraham's blessing by the Lord: the descendants as numberless as the

stars. It is not only the law that is preserved by Paul, but the descendants too, just as Genesis 16 preserves the generations of Hagar, and Genesis 17 and 25 preserves the generations of Ishmael. And, I should say, as Genesis 36 preserves the generations of Esau. It is not just 'material' that is preserved: the logic of preservation is the preservation of *peoples*. But at the same time, something more worrying may be at work in the texts. It is a in some ways the logic of burial: the preservation of *names* at the same time as the marking of their *passing away*. And this is why it is such a dangerous business. If Christians see their theology as a means of *burying* Judaism, this will mean something darkly different from remembering the blessings poured by God on the different families. In some sense, there is a *passing away* between the traditions: this is their *otherness*. But there is also a *memory of names*: this is the memory of familial blessings and the generations which are meant to continue. The logic of burial, which we see in Christian theology again and again, is more than a theoretical danger when its consequence is that traditions are buried alive. It is difficult to say whether one sees this in Genesis 17 and 25 or in Romans 4. The urgent task is to find interpretations which do not follow this bleak logic.

I think Steve Kepnes struggles a little to see the significance of his own logic of preservation when he sees Christian hermeneutics as complex and perhaps even self-contradictory. Of course he is right: but I think it is misleading to give all the credit to Christians here, and I'd like to share the wealth. It is the logic of preservation that *seems* complex and self-contradictory when viewed from the perspective of the logic of binary opposition. Drawing out the riches of Steve Kepnes' analysis, I would say that the logic of preservation is an *alternative* to a logic of binary opposition. It is precisely a logic of binary opposition that forces the reader to choose: Hagar *or* Sarai; Ishmael *or* Isaac; Esau *or* Jacob. And, indeed, the text does rehearse this possibility: there is genuine expulsion, of Hagar, Ishmael and Esau. But there is also a logic of preservation: the genealogies, the burial of Abraham, the tribes of Edom.

What we see in Scriptural Reasoning is a re-reading of texts; these texts practise a logic of burial; scriptural reasoning develops a logic of preservation into another form of a logic of dialogue: a logic of scripture, and here I simply echo Steve Kepnes' reminder of the importance of the work of Peter

Ochs. Our texts may practise a logic of burial, but the generations of the different families have continued, as God commanded them to do. Our texts have merely preserved the other. But when we gather, today, to read together these testimonies of preservation, we practise *more than preservation*. We do not have a vocabulary, yet, to say what this *more* might be. But we do have the practice which teaches us, together, how we might hold our otherness and our identity together, through the reading of scripture.

For me, Steve Kepnes achieves— with remarkable clarity and skill— a logic of preservation where both otherness and identity are *both* evoked with respect to the one who binds them together: the one Lord of Genesis 16, 21, 25 and the God of Romans 4. The otherness and identity are not overcome or absorbed into some super-reality where differences are obliterated, and nations are assimilated into each other. Instead, they are preserved, not just for the same of preservation, but as the preservation of a set of family relations *before God. More than preservation is the result*. And that is why we are meeting here, today, in Hartford…

With these issues in mind, I want to return to the *negative* remarks I began with: the things that Steve Kepnes did not do. But the perspective I wish to introduce now is the crucial contribution that Muslims and Qur'anic reasoning make to scriptural reasoning.

Two things are worth clarifying. First, those who do scriptural reasoning are typically not experts in the other religious traditions: so the Muslims who do scriptural reasoning are not typically experts in Rabbinics or in Patristics. Second, scriptural reasoning might look to an outsider like an exercise where members of one tradition *teach* members of other traditions about the tradition to which they belong. This is not the case at all, and I think the Muslim contribution shows very clearly how this is so. At this juncture I would like to attempt, in a preliminary way, to show that non-Muslims are attentive to practices of squaring the circle.

Let us take another look at the list of 'DON'T's.

(1) Muslims do not approach their sacred texts in the dominating attitude of an expert, one who has *command* over the text, and can bend it to his or

her will. They neither assimilate to Western liberal paradigms and present their texts as mere historical documents, nor do they adopt the hermetic attitude of the middle eastern seer who claims that none but the initiated can understand them. Rather, they approach the texts with an exemplary humility, reverence and intimacy, as God's gift which evokes study and wonder.

(2) Muslims do not approach their sacred texts in the dominating attitude of the absolutely free reader, whose interpretations are always valid because they arise from his or her own personal *experience*. They do not force the texts to submit to the demands of their own infinite subjectivity, or distort them into meaning whatever they want them to mean. Rather, they approach the texts with a sense that their own subjectivity is evoked by the texts, and made possible by the divine love that shines in those texts.

In other words, our Muslim colleagues display forms of reading that have nothing to do with the tact and sensitivity that would place the Qur'an under glass, in a display case. Nor do they fling the text about as if its relevance to discussion can be magicked into being by the superpowers of the reader. The texts are objects of love— both reverentially distant and therefore a matter of both humility and astonishing intimacy and therefore a matter of love and delight.

Our Muslim colleagues display forms of reading that have nothing to do with the vatic posture of the expert who claims to know the text's secrets: this would transform other participants into sponges for knowledge. Scriptural reasoning does not degenerate into a forum for explaining 'what the Qur'an means' in the manner of a rather bad undergraduate lecture. Rather, it becomes an opportunity for displaying distance and proximity, reverence and delight, humility and love. Muslim colleagues have, of course, a deep knowledge of the tradition of interpretation of Qur'an, but this knowledge is not the medium in which the text study takes place. Instead, it functions as an inspiration for the detailed attention to the texts, and the surprises they hold not just for Christians and Jews (for whom, at least in my case, everything comes as a surprise) but even— and perhaps *especially*— for Muslims who find new and different things in the texts: aspects that may be muted in the tradition but which fizz to the surface in scriptural reasoning.

And it is infectious. The effect of being in the presence of Muslims who are generous-hearted to their brothers and sisters from other religions and who share this humility and love with us is quite shocking. It is different from what I might have anticipated and has fundamentally shaped how I approach not just the Qur'an but even texts in my own tradition. This needs saying carefully: I do not mean that I read the New Testament as if it were the Qur'an. Instead, I mean that I become conscious just how seductive the postures of the expert, or the empowered reader, or the imperatives of tact and sensitivity have become for the reading of scripture in my own tradition, and I find I have learned resources from my Muslim colleagues in how to overcome these contradictions. It is an extraordinary thing.

But most of all, I have begun to make friends with Muslim members of the Abrahamic family of faiths. Not just casual friendships rooted in shared interest, but relationships that are somehow characterised by the distance and proximity, humility and intimacy that the texts themselves evoke. I do not have any clever theories for how this happens: it is always a surprise to me, each time we do scriptural reasoning together. And for that, I give thanks to God.

ISLAM AS OUR OTHER ISLAM AS OURSELF

Steven Kepnes

In my talk to today I will argue that Islam, as the third monotheistic religion, shares a dual identity as both other and same to Judaism, to Christianity and to the Christian West. This ambiguous position calls forth the ambiguous emotions of sibling rivalry but also promises the possibility of brotherly and sisterly love. From the point of view of scripture, which is my point of entry into any theological discussion, Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity not only a devotion to the one God, to the goodness of creation, and the dream of a future time of judgment and peace, but the very basic principle that revelation is given in scripture. We are all people of the book in this sense and though our books are different we share common narratives, common prophets, and common hermeneutical principles to guide us in the interpretation of scripture. And this gives us, despite all differences, a common starting ground for discussion of the issues that both divide and unite us.

For my reflections today on the simultaneous otherness and sameness of Islam to Judaism and Christianity, I have chosen the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael. I begin with my own texts because I must begin with what I know and where I stand. I must admit that I began my scriptural reasoning on Hagar and Ishmael with a worry that it may not be the appropriate place to start, since the Jewish tradition is fairly negative about these figures. Yet as I reread the stories I was taken in by the spiritual insights and depth of the character of Hagar. And I recalled a point made by the modern Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, which I take to be most instructive in doing scriptural reasoning. Buber argues that the Torah should be viewed, not as an objective history of world creation and redemption, but as a story of the relation of God to Israel that is told primarily from the perspective of the people of Israel.[303] It certainly moves out from Israel to attempt to embrace the entire world, but its starting point

[303] Martin Buber, *On the Bible,* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p.24.

is a small family that wanders from some where in ancient Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan and comes to see itself as bearing a world historic message. This means that the Torah is at once a particularistic and universal document. I could put this somewhat differently and say that the Torah is both an ethnocentric and theocentric document. From the ethnocentric perspective of Israel, Hagar may be a mere slave girl and Ishmael a wild ass of a man and thorn in the side of Israel, but from the perspective of the larger narrative of the Bible and from the perspective of God, Hagar and Ishmael have a unique role in God's design.

Also, although some might be put off by Hagar's status as a lowly slave girl. This fact actually unites her to Jewish and Christian origins. For the children of Israel trace their origins to their status as Egyptian slaves who were freed by God and Christians find their origins in the death of a lowly carpenter who suffered the criminal's death of crucifixion.

Yet in addition to these rough analogies to overarching concepts, the use of scripture, and lowly origins, the stronger point I wish to make, is that the presence of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in scripture embeds the Muslim people in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of the Christians. Hagar is at once the other who comes from Egypt, the land of exile and slavery, and the wife of the patriarch Abraham through whom all the peoples of the world will be blessed. Hagar is at once the surrogate womb for Sarah to exploit, and the second wife of Abraham and mother of his first son. The most obvious implication of this to me is that although Islam is often presented as the other to Judaism and Christianity and to the strange fiction called the "Judeo-Christian Tradition," Hagar and Ishmael's presence in those very scriptures is a warrant for Jews and Christians to take Islam seriously not only as the third monotheism but as a tradition that is rooted in Genesis and whose origin and destiny is intertwined with Israel. If Islam is rooted in the Hebrew scriptures what this opens up is a new possibility to see Islam as not opposed to the Judeo-Christian tradition of Monotheism but, indeed a part of it. Through Hagar and Ishmael, Islam regains its place as simultaneously the first child of Abraham and the third stage in the development of Monotheism. What this means is that we have a warrant in the revealed texts of Judaism and Christianity to engage with Muslims not as strange others but as long lost members of the great family whose destiny is

to be a light of truth and healing to all the nations of the world. Thus, the greatest significance of scriptural reasoning is that it is beginning to see the advent of a new religious consciousness that recognizes that there is not just a Judeo-Christian tradition but a Jewish-Christian-Islamic reality.

With this as an introduction I will move now to scripture.

GENESIS 16

7 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." 9The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." 10The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." 11And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. 12He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." 13So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" 14Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

The first thing to note in these verses is that we have the first appearance of an angel in biblical literature and the first time that God speaks to a woman. Thus, though a slave-girl, Hagar merits particular interest on the part of God. God sends a messenger to her, the messenger finds her in the middle of a journey back to Egypt (as Shur is close to Egypt Gen 25:13), and he finds her by a well. Well scenes are replete throughout the Genesis narrative and thus we call the visits of Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, even Joseph to wells at crucial points in their lives. The angel asks a highly loaded question, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" Clearly the angel knows where Hagar comes from. So this question must be asked more for Hagar's sake then for the angel's. This is the type of question that is only asked of biblical characters of significance, Adam, Cain, Abraham. Elijah,

Jonah. It is an existential question that seeks out a person's integrity and ability to respond and to take responsibility. It is a kind of trick question or question of testing that biblical figures often fail. Hagar's answer however, is straight forward, honest, unequivocal, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." Apparently, Hagar passes the test but his leads to a seemingly cruel command that she return and submit, or literally "place herself under her mistress's hand." Given that biblical law demands that one help a run-away slave escape, this is, indeed, a strange command. We can either view it as an expression of the cruelty of slavery, of abusive patriarchy and divine tyranny or search in it for another level of meaning. If, indeed, I am correct, that the first question, "where have you come from…" is a test, then the command that follows my be interpreted as a deeper more difficult test. Hagar, must return to Sarah and submit to her. Although the Hebrew *hitani* appears to have no relation to the Arabic word to submit, am I stretching to far to find an intimation to the command all Muslim's, indeed all Jews and Christians, have to submit to the will of God? The supposition however, that God wishes Hagar no ill and, indeed, has a special mission for her is born out in the next lines. "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." Nahum Sarna notes that the messenger uses a rhetorical form that signifies "the birth and destiny of one who is given a special role in God's design of history (cf. Gen 25:23 and Judges 13:3)."[304] It is easy to see connections between Hagar and the first women, Eve. The Hebrew *harbeh arbeh* "I will greatly multiply…" is the same phrase that God uses in the curse of Eve, in greatly multiplying Eve's pain in childbirth. Yet, the consequence of result of Hagar's suffering is that she will be abundantly rewarded with multitudes of descendents. Thus, unlike Eve, Hagar is blessed and not cursed. Since Hagar flees Sarah's home in Canaan, heads for Egypt and then returns to Canaan, her journey reminds us of Abraham's journeys. Like Abraham, Hagar is a wanderer who comes to hear the word of call and fulfil a divine mission.

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[304] *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p.85.

Tikvah Frymer -Kensky reminds us that the verses that describe Hagar fleeing the home of Sarah and travelling toward Egypt occur right after God has told Abraham in 15:13 that his offspring will be enslaved in Egypt.[305]

> ***Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be strangers [****Ger iyeh zarha****] in a land that is not theirs and they shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.***

It is startling when we realize that the word used to describe Israel in Egypt is *Ger*. *Ger iyeh zarha*, "strangers shall your offspring be." Thus, God tells Abraham in chapter 15, that his offspring will be literally be *Gerim*. And in the next chapter we meet Hagar, *Ha-Ger*, the Egyptian stranger. Frymer-Kensky makes the point obvious, Hagar, the stranger, Hagar the servant, Hagar, wife of Abraham and mother of Ishmael *is* Israel! She presages, she prefigures, Israel's suffering in Egypt. And in her deep connection to God, and in the fact that God sees and listens to her suffering and rewards her with a multitude of offspring, Hagar also prefigures Israel's ultimate redemption!

But now we must pause to reflect on Ishmael and who he is. First, we have his wonderful name which means "God hears." Our verses connect the hearing to God attending to Hagar's suffering.

> ***for the Lord has given heed to your affliction." But later in verse 21:17 a connection is made to God's hearing the voice of Ishmael. "And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is' (21:17)."***

In 16:15, Abraham gives Hagar's son the name Ishmael, fulfilling the divine directive and also legitimizing Ishmael as his son.[306] Ishmael clearly has

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[305] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Sarah and Hagar," *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide* (NY: Doubleday, 1996), p.97.

a name that suggests that God hears and will attend to his voice; and thus the Torah seems to recognize and underscore that Ishmael and his offspring will maintain a special relationship to God and that God will continue to hear the voice of Ishmael wherever he is!

In this context, it is somewhat difficult to understand the second part of the description of Ishmael in verse 12. "He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." I have previously described this as the view of Ishmael from the perspective of Israel, which highlights the tension between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac. It is thus not necessarily some deep description of the eternal nature of Ishmael and his descendents. It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse "*al penai kol echav ishkan*" translates it not as "he shall live at odds with" but, "He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen." This stresses the intricate relationship between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac without the eternal state of conflict.[307] It is

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306 *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, Sarna, p.88.

307 There is very strong scholarly tradition of Qur'an commentary in Islam, going back to the earliest times, which, in order of preference, gives a very special place to the Old and New Testaments as the exegetical tools to understand the Qur'anic narrative. According to their hierarchical arrangement, these scriptures are the next to the Qur'an itself. Hamid al-Din Farahi and Amin Ahsan Islahi are the two great representatives of this line of commentators in modern times. Steven Kepnes' treatment of the figures of Ishmael and Hagar resonates very strongly with some of the best commentaries on the Qur'an on the issue of Ishmael and Hagar. At this point in his paper he says, "It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse "*al penai kol echav ishkan*" translates it not as "he shall live at odds with" but, "He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen."

It is almost exactly the same what Amin Ahsan Islahi, the greatest of contemporary Qur'an commentators,has written in his *Tadabbur i Qur'an*, (Meditating on the Qur'an) the best of commentaries on the Qur'an to be written in the 20th century. It is very interesting to look at the way Muslim and Jewish scholars approach and reason with their respective Scriptures as well as the Scripture of the Other. What is more amazing is that Islahi has used, obviously quite independently and remaining within the tradition of Qur'an commentary, the same proof texts from Exodus and Genesis that Steve does with a slightly different treatment. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the subject so I translate a few paragraphs from his *Tadabbur i Qur'an* (Faran Foundation, Lahore, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 327-329) to give an idea to the readers.

further interesting that the description of Ishmael in the later chapter 21 describes him in less contentious terms. "God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (21: 20-21)

If we leave Ishmael and return to the fascinating figure of Hagar. We have to comment on the fact she names God and furthermore is the only figure, male or female, in the Bible to do this! "So she named the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'" 16:13. This expression seems to give witness not only to God seeing into the very soul of Hagar, and her passing this test, but to Hagar's own ability to see God! It is remarkable that after God names Ishmael, Hagar names God, and the Hebrew expression used in both these occasions are similar. Thus "*Korat Shmo Ismael*," "you shall call him Ishmael"…is followed by "*v'tikrah shem Adonai,*" "And She called God…"

It was necessary for the sacrifices that these should be offered to the Lord in the *ma'bad* (place of worship) and …the Holy of the Holy was prescribed to face the South. Similarly the greatest annual sacrifice was also made facing the South. This is a significant point which is usually not taken into consideration whereas it is an established fact that the Tent of worship of the Jews always faced North from the beginning. (See Exodus 27: 9)…"and the table was set out side the curtain in the northern corner of the tent of gathering and on it the bread was placed before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and the lamp was also placed in the tent of gathering on the southern side." (Exodus 40: 21-24) In our view the rationale of all these directions is that who ever enters the presence of he Lord would face South i.e. towards Mecca and the Abrahamic tabernacle….. This is further corroborated by the fact that God had made this tabernacle the place towards the children of Abraham faced (*qiblah*). Abraham made his descendents settle in the North and East of Arabia and made the dwelling place of Ishmael their *qiblah*. Torah says that Ishmael settled facing his brothers. Genesis 25: 18 says "….*He dwelt facing all his kinsmen*" and Genesis 16:12 says "*He shall be a free man like a wild ass, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live facing all his kin*." There can be no other correct explanation of "*he shall live facing all his kin*" as all the descendents of Abraham settled in the North and East of Arabia except Ishmael and who could *"live facing all his kin*" only if his dwelling happened to be in the direction to which they all faced. (Note that Islahi translates these verses from the Hebrew Bible differently, without knowing the recent Jewish Publication Society version mentioned above, without the tenor of the earlier translation which read, "*He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.*)
M. S. Umar, Editor.

The Hebrew expression *v'tikrah shem Adonai* also calls to mind a different use of the phrase by Abraham in Genesis 13:13. Here we also have v-*ikrah bshem adonai.* This is generally rendered in English "and Abraham called on or called out the name of God." However, the Talmud interprets this to mean that Abraham was fulfilling his prophetic role and publicizing the revelation of the oneness of God throughout the world. Could it be that Hagar was not just speaking to herself when he called out God's name, but also wished to publicize her revelation of God as one who sees into the essence of humanity and one who sees the suffering of humanity and responds to it? If this were true, Hagar would be a counterpart to Abraham as another evangelist of the One God.

After Abraham dies, we hear nothing more about Hagar except that a hint of her and what she represents seems to live on in the Torah. This hint is found in the countless references to Ha-ger to the stranger and how Israel is to treat the stranger. The notion of the Ger occurs no less than thirty-six times in the Torah and is connected with the commandment to treat the stranger as one of Israel. The nineteenth century German Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen, argues that the development of the notion of the "*Ger"* in the Torah represents one of the most significant events in the history of all of monotheism. Cohen tells us that the *Ger* is a "great step with which humanitarianism begins." [308] The power of this notion can be clearly seen in two texts of the Torah. "One law shall be unto him that is home-born and unto the *Ger*, the stranger that lives among you (Ex 12:49) (cf. Num 15.15, Lev 24.22, Deut 1.16)." "Thou shall love the Ger, the stranger as yourself (Lev 19:33)."

Cohen tells us that what is remarkable about the notion of the *Ger* is that it achieves its development as monotheism is codified in law and given political expression in the nation. Thus, the notion of the *Ger* is not developed as an afterthought, but comes immediately with the formation of Israel. Here, under the commandment of the Torah, the stranger must be treated equally, even though he is not a member of the house of Israel.

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[308] Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. S. Kaplan. (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995), p. 121.

In the holiness code of Leviticus, the principle of the *Ger* as fellowman is intensified to the commandment of love. "You shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev 19.33). Where Kantian ethics develops the responsibility of the self for others on the basis of a universal rational law, the categorical imperative, and the recognition a fundamental moral duty, Cohen recognizes that humans are not motivated by reason and duty alone. In turning to Leviticus, Cohen follows the lead of the Torah to add the emotions of love and compassion to the ethical relation. "Religion achieves what morality fails to achieve. Love for man is brought forth"[309] The Torah accomplishes this achievement on the basis of Israel's own experience of slavery. Israel should be able to identify with the stranger and love her because she too went through the experience of being a stranger when she was in Egypt.[310]

II

I hope that I have convinced you of the power of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of Christians. I have argued that far from being "the other" these figures are part of the very fabric that ties the people of Israel to God. Having walked you through a short exercise in scriptural reasoning with the Torah I would like now to speak a little more about the power of scripture in general and the power of the three particular scriptures of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This will

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[309] *Ibid.*, p.146.

[310] It seems that there is a rough parallel in the Torah's notion of the Ger to the notion of the Dimi in Muslim societies. The Dimi is granted respect and certain protections; but the position of the Dimi, like that of the Ger, is not ultimately equal to the members of the host societies. I will shortly discuss the modern way of dealing with the relation of host societies to others who do not share the dominate religio-cultural identity. The modern way is to move to a universal homogenized culture which dissolves all cultural differences between peoples and assures them all the same minimal human rights. Although this strategy has obvious advantages, it also has the disadvantage of depriving people of life giving religio-cultural systems. Scriptural Reasoning attempts to forge a third way between the solution of bestowing minority status, as in the Ger or Dimi, and washing out all cultural difference in a universal global culture, and abstract declaration of human rights. That third way may begin from the notions of the Ger and Dimi but need to move well-beyond them to recognition of equal status for those who are different before God.

allow me to say a few things about the promise of the movement called scriptural reasoning which I and a number of our panellists are a part. In speaking about scriptural reasoning, one of my central tasks will be to distinguish it from Western philosophic reasoning.

One of the wonders of scripture that I discovered again in my research into Hagar and Ishmael is that scripture is not beholden to modern secular standards of narrative, historical and philosophic coherence. These standards might demand that Hagar and Ishmael, as minor figures in the story of Israel, be painted in wholly negative terms or be excised from the narrative after they have filled their functions as foils to Sarah and Isaac. Yet, we see that after these figures are introduced in Genesis 16 and 21 they are not erased but they appear again. Thus, seemingly out of the blue, Ishmael appears in chapter 25:9 to bury his father Abraham alongside Isaac. The burial site is not just any place but the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was also buried. Scripture then tells us that Isaac settled near *Beer-lahai-roi*, the place where God revealed himself to Hagar! The fact that Isaac settles here clearly ties him to Hagar. After being informed of this, we then are given a long list of the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12). Narrative coherence might demand that this information on Ishmael be left out. Or, rather, if Hagar and Ishmael were truly enemies of Israel, coherence might demand that they be painted in consistent negative portraits. Yet, what we find is a far more complex portrait of these figures. As I have shown, Hagar is a counterpart of Abraham in prophetic sight, she is a positive counterpart to Eve, and her wandering, suffering, and blessing are counterparts to Israel's slavery and redemption. Similarly, Ishmael might be a wild ass of a man but then, in the end, he shows up as a dutiful son to his father and brother to Isaac at Abraham's burial.

We may say that this treatment of the other as both different and same, foe and friend is unique to the Jewish scriptures. But if we move to the New Testament, we see an equally ambivalent portrait of the most clear and obvious other to the Christian, the Jew. On the one hand, we have the portrait of the Jews as hypocrites, Christ killers, stubborn sinners doomed to Hell, and on the other hand the Jews carry the law that Christ fulfils without abrogating. The Jews represent the trunk of the tree onto which Christians are grafted. And most importantly, the scriptures of the Jews, despite many

attempts to sever their connection to Christianity, are tenaciously maintained, preserved, and even revered as part of Christian scriptures, as the Old Testament.

Holding on to the Jewish scriptures as Christian scripture simply put, is not easy. Certainly, from the standpoint of narrative and logical coherence it doesn't really work. To pull it off, Christianity must develop a complex, self-contradictory hermeneutic which says at once that Jewish scripture is revealed and wrong. Its way of Torah, its way of the law, is both necessary and superseded. Its promise to the children of Abraham both nullified and fulfilled.

Muslims may look over the shoulders at Christians and see this as strange, but they must admit that they have a similar ambivalence about their older monotheistic brothers and sisters. On the one hand, Muhammad is the final seal, the last prophet, the one who corrects what was wrong in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. On the other hand, the Qur'an, in its infinite mercy and openness, recognizes Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and many others as prophets. And the Qur'an preserves many of the narratives of the Jewish and Christian scripture and it praises the people of the book as righteous children of Abraham. There is no question that there are highly negative statements about the Jews and the Christians in the Qur'an, but if we remember Buber's insight that scripture is at least partially written from the perspective of one people in an attempt to understand their unique relation to God, we can understand why non-Muslims are presented, at times, in a negative light. Yet, if I may return to my original point about scripture, one of its truly wondrous aspects is that it neither thoroughly demonize the other nor does it leave their narratives out. On the contrary, it preserves the memories and stories of the others and says, in fundamental ways, that these other are related to us. These others, indeed, are us! Thus we read in the Qur'an Surah 2:62.

> ***The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does what is good shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve.***

And in Surah 2:135-36

We follow the religion of Abraham who was no polytheist.

We believe in Allah, in what has been revealed to us, what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and in what was imparted to Moses, Jesus, making no distinction between any of them.

And finally, in Surah 3:1-3

Allah, There is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting.

***He revealed the Book to you in truth, confirming what came before it* And He has revealed the Torah and the Gospel.**

Our dear friend Peter Ochs likes to say that if we look at the logical pattern of modern Western philosophy and the modern culture which it reflects, we are offered a way of thinking that follows a logic of dichotomies. One the one hand, we have secularists on the other religious fundamentalist; on the other hand, we have the progressive West and the other backward Islam. On the one hand, we have modernity, on the other tradition. Light/dark, Spirit/matter, male/female, same/other, us/them, yes/no, 0/1, these are the binaries that define our thinking and our world.

However, in the face of this logic, scripture offers us another way of thinking. Ochs calls it, following Peirce, a logic of relations. In this logic the binary pairs are placed in dialogue. To paraphrase the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, scripture places the isolated elements, God, World and Human in fundamental relations. Scripture offers us concepts of connectedness: creation, revelation, covenant, redemption. It offers us figures of mediation, Adam, Abraham, Hagar, Jesus and Muhammad. These figures are given to fill the gap between us and them, between God and human and between human and human.

This is not to say that scripture is innocent and pure, divorced from dichotomies of spirit and matter, saved and damned us and them. Indeed, if we look, we can find ample examples of these oppositions. But, the point is that scripture cannot be adequately and fully define by these dichotomies.

Rather, a closer look reveals, in almost every page of the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an, elements and figures that lie outside of neat dichotomies and divisions. Scripture is filled with lacunae, gaps, inconsistencies and mysterious sayings, images, and parables that defy simple logic. Scripture, again in the words of Ochs, is "vague," its meaning unclear and hidden.

Because of the fundamental vagueness of scripture, the reader is called upon, indeed, required to interpret the text. Unlike a mathematical formula, or a simple sign like a traffic light, scripture does not yield clear, distinct, univocal meanings. Scripture, instead, is an opaque semiotic system whose meaning is fulfilled in its interpretation by us. This is another way of pointing to the logic of relations of scripture. Its meaning is only given in relation to the interpreter or community of interpreters that receives it. In Hebrew, the Torah is often called the *Miqra* which means a calling out. Thus, the Torah is a system of signs that calls out, it calls out to those who listen for it and truly hear it. But we could also reverse the line of communication and say that the cry does not only come from scripture, but that it comes from humans who cry out in their need and suffering. As a conduit of communication between God and humans, scripture itself is a form of mediation, a vessel that bridges the gaps in material and spiritual life. As a conduit for divine communication, scripture is an agent of healing, redemption, even salvation.

Now if my description of the logic of relations in scripture is correct, we should not be shy and bringing our voice and cries of the twenty-first century to it. I have already spoken of the dichotomizing logic of the modern world and I have, at least, intimated that scripture may give us a vision and a way to heal that logic. But I want to go even further and suggest that scripture holds within it additional spiritual resources that may help us to address the suffering in our existential and historical world today.

Certainly, the problem that plagues contemporary Jews, Christians, and Muslims today is the problem of distrust, hatred, and misunderstanding between us. One of the great blessings and also curses of the modern world is that the world seems to have shrunk. You know the movie "Honey I shrunk the kids!" Well, modern world leaders could easily adopt this and say, "Honey, we shrank the world!" What this means is that we no longer have

the luxury of Hagar to run away into the wilderness where we can be alone and isolated from each other. Where Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the pre-modern world could pretty much keep to themselves, we, like Ishmael and Isaac, must live next to each other. And like Ishmael and Isaac, we can either live against each other or alongside each other. Certainly, our scriptures offer us ammunition to oppose one another and even kill one another. But it also offers us alternative avenues of mediation, conciliation, and peaceful co-existence.

As well as offering us a logic of dichotomies, modernity, to be fair to it, did and still does offer us another way to solve the problem of many different people, with different cultures, living in an increasingly smaller world. This is the route of universal principles, universal rights of men, a universal economic order, and a universal global culture. The universalizing move of modernity flips all the dichotomies vertically and subsumes the bottom element into the top. Thus, the other is subsumed into the same, "them" is subsumed into "us," tradition is subsumed into modernity, religion into secularism, East into West, etc., etc.

Although this modern solution has had some success, it has also led to great suffering throughout the world as people see their traditional cultures, local customs, belief in God-- which are constructed to preserve human dignity and ethical relations between communal members-- dissolving in the solvent of modern universalisms. Certainly, part of the supposed battle between secularism and fundamentalism and between the modern West and Islam is a reaction to the relentless onslaught of a modern universalism which would wash away all particularism in the tidal wave of a global culture. Here again, I believe that scriptural reasoning can be an aid. Although, some have argued that monotheism represents the first great attempt at an imperialistic and universalistic world culture, the record from the scriptures suggests something else. If I follow Buber's logic and assert that three scriptures offer a mixture of particularism and universalism, the Torah singles out Abraham, but he is told that "all the nations of the world will be blessed through you." Before Abraham, Noah, a non-Israelite, is called "righteous" and before him Adam, the first human who represents all humans, is created in the image of God. The Tower of Babel story clearly favours a diversity of peoples and languages as it suggests that the attempt to have one language,

and one culture, is counter to God's will. I have given only hints to parallel attempts in the New Testament and Qur'an to negotiate particularity and universalism and to provide resources for conciliation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I will leave it to others to expand on these resources and close by returning to Hagar and Ishmael and then say some final words about what the study of Islamic texts has meant to scriptural reasoning.

What I especially like about the Hagar and Ishmael narratives in the Torah is that the differences between Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael are neither overlooked nor dissolved. The tension and conflict between then is neither denied nor obscured. Instead difference, tension, conflict is acknowledged and strategies and models for conciliation and coexistence offered. This conciliation and coexistence is offered not on the basis of some universal principle, or abstract declaration of human unity, but, instead on the basis of a shared sense of the oneness of God.

Hagar may be a servant and stranger, but she also is a woman, who suffers, wanders, fears, perseveres until she sees God. Ishmael, whose name means "God hears", may be the son of a surrogate mother, who is unloved by his father's wife and tossed under a bush to die, but he also knows how to cry out to God and is heard by God. Hagar and Ishmael may be others to Israel, but in their suffering and redemption Hagar and Ishmael also represent Israel. And in their spiritual search they recall the "suffering servants" of the Lord who even go beyond Israel to represent the spiritual struggle of all human beings.

The movement of scriptural reasoning began over a dozen years ago as a group of Jewish philosophers gathered to read Jewish texts with scholars of Talmud and Jewish mysticism. The movement was enlarged and broadened when Christians joined us some ten years ago and we then read from the Torah and the New Testament. This was fairly natural for Christians, because the Torah is part of the Christian Bible and despite the long history of Jewish and Christian animosities, there has been, for over a century, a sense that it was the combination of Judaism and Christianity together with Greek culture that produced what is sometimes called Western culture or as we like to say in America, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Following the holocaust and with recent Christian scholarship of the historical Jesus and the Jewish character

of the early Church, Christian scholars have sought to bring Christianity closer to Judaism. But this has been met by an increasing Jewish and Christian antipathy toward Islam.

Scriptural Reasoning was relatively tame and acceptable when its practitioners read and interpreted the Torah and New Testament, but the movement really became bold and internationally significant when, about seven years ago it started to included the study of Islamic texts. One can imagine the exciting possibilities for discourse and discovery if you merely consider the math. When you move from two partners to three, from a dyad to a triad, the possibilities multiply. Two represents a lovely couple capable of romance but three represents a family, the challenge to bring romance into reality. Emmanuel Levinas has said that the relation of the one to another can easily remain a private matter, but when you add a third, you enter the public domain, things get far more complex and you must consider issues of justice. We have already discussed the problem of binaries which tend toward polarities and oppositions. When a third is added complexity multiplies but so too do terms of relation and mediation. I have already mentioned my sense that the three scriptures are each, in their own way, a combination ethnocentrism and theocentrism. Ochs likes to say that the enlightenment sought a solution to what it saw as excessive ethnocentrism in the Bible by substituting abstract universals for God. My sense is that the addition of Islamic texts to scriptural reasoning supplies us with yet another avenue to approach the problem of the new modern form of ethnocentrism. This is an ethnocentrism which pits the Judeo-Christian Tradition and its modern reincarnation in a post-capitalist global culture against the rest of the world. In the face of this new ethnocentrism, Islam, as both "Western and Eastern" both Us and Them, Same and Different, can be the crucial mediating element between the West and the world. In addition, Islam offers the world the possibility of another chance, another model, for dealing with the conflict between tradition and modernity, between religion and the secular. Judaism followed Christianity in allowing its religious texts, rituals, symbols and liturgies to be disembowelled and made over into the terms of the enlightenment. In this process, Christianity and Judaism became "modern liberal religions" that were transformed into mere handmaidens of modernity. They became shallow reflections of enlightenment ideals and

supplied superficial prooftexts to legitimize and not challenge the new modern economic, political, social, and cultural order.

Islam has, by and large, resisted the modern West and now wages a somewhat desperate battle to preserve its traditional beliefs and practices in the face of modernity. Islamic leaders are certainly aware of the avenues carved out by modern Jews and Christians and some are calling for Muslims to follow parallel paths. Yet others are trying to blaze a new way that will steer between the paths of modern liberal religion on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other. Some Muslims, whose representatives are in this room, are trying to do again the mix of tradition and modernity, Islam and secularism, in new ways that will be a true mediation between the two poles of fundamentalism and secularism and a source of healing and truth that contemporary Jews and Christians will want to follow.

RESPONSE TO STEVEN KEPNES

Ian Markham

It is so much easier to respond to a paper that one finds problematic. But when one largely agrees with the argument and drift of a paper, a response is difficult. It is tempting to simply assert 'I concur' and leave it at that.

However, given the conventions of these occasions do not permit such a response, I shall instead offer a supplement to Kepnes' argument. The primary problem in interfaith relations is the providing of reasons for 'orthodox' adherents of our faith communities to view each other constructively. And the strategies of liberal modernity are doomed to failure. Instead Kepnes' strategy shows how our sacred texts model a possible way of both affirming our particularities and our obligation to respect the other.

To start this exercise, I propose to offer a summary of Kepnes' argument that works from his conclusion.

1. The temptation of modernity is to think in terms of 'universals'. Yet the dynamic of religious faith needs to celebrate the particular. Therefore appeals to 'respect human rights' or 'recognize all religions are partial including our own' have a very limited appeal.
2. The approach of Scriptural reasoning is that both the universal and the particular are celebrated and affirmed.
3. Embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures are important symbols of Islam.
4. Scripture is deliberately ambiguous in the treatment of these characters reflecting both the status of the other within a certain tradition and at the same time the obligation to co-exist in some meaningful way with the other.
5. A Scriptural approach is preferable to a modernist approach.

I want to suggest this argument is sound. And I shall supplement the argument in two ways. First, I shall look at the ways in which alternative approaches to religious difference are misguided; and second, I shall extract

from Kepnes' approach the criteria for a legitimate internal exposition of the other.

So on the first, please allow me to start with a prediction. In one hundred years time, the approach to religious difference that characterizes much of the interfaith industry will be rightly criticized for being deeply misguided. Kepnes' gentle argument that modernity takes a distinctive approach that loses sight of many of the particularities is exactly right. For example, Hans Kung has spent much of the last twenty years working on a Global Ethic. A text was adopted at the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993 (Chicago), which has continued to be disseminated and discussed. It starts with the environmental and justice issues and calls for a mixture of individual responsibility, mutual respect, non-violence, recognition of our mutual interdependence, and a striving for a just social and economic order.

Kung hopes that this document will have the same impact on world history as the American Declaration of Independence. This is very optimistic. And it overlooks the relationship of the Declaration of Independence to the American War for Independence. The document succeeded partly because it was enforced. The Declaration was a rhetoric, which was firmly grounded.

Now the problem with the Global Ethic is that it persuades those who are already persuaded. For all those already living in a tradition, which is heavily shaped by liberal modernity, it is easy to identify with such rhetoric. But for all those inhabiting a particular tradition, with its internal explanations for those who are different, the rhetoric disappears behind a set of prior questions. For the orthodox in many faith traditions, the problems are truth, soteriology, fidelity, and the relationship of ethics to belief. In other words, although the Orthodox might be sympathetic to the global ethic (and many do support non-violence, justice, and respect), the platitudes overlook so much more that matters.

For this reason, Kung's Global Ethics is unhelpful. It represents the sloganizing of modernity at its most naïve. In much the same way that my eight year old son can't understand why people don't just play a chess game to resolve arguments instead of resorting to war; so Kung suspects that

articulating these principles will make the particularities of each tradition disappear.

Kepnes' response is much more thoughtful. He is tapping into arguments that historically have already persuaded orthodox adherents to behave in a constructive way towards the other. When Aquinas used the work of Maimonides, he did so because the Jew has received so much from God that it is reasonable to assume that a near contemporary Jew had further insights from God. Granted Aquinas still made highly unhelpful (to say the least) observations about both Jews and Muslims, but it didn't stop him believing that God had disclosed truth to the Jew and Muslim from whom he could learn.

Kepnes is also suggesting arguments that can work today. Kepnes wants to work with the people of faith who take their Scriptures seriously. Therefore Kepnes wants to work with the vast majority of believers. (The liberals in each tradition are in a pathetic minority.) He wants to take the orthodox and deeply committed and help them to see that their Scriptures justify highly nuanced attitudes to the other. It will not be as neat as Kung, but we can be sure it will be more effective.

This leads to my second area of discussion: can we identify the criteria that makes Kepnes strategy work? What exactly is legitimate? At what point does it become illegitimate?

Allow me to suggest four criteria. The first is that the strategy must draw on authentic resources of revelation. For the orthodox, the primary goal of faith is to discover what God requires. For the Jew, this must involve taking the Torah (and by extension the Prophets and the Writings) seriously. For the Muslim, it is the Qur'an and the Hadith. For the Christian, it is the insights disclosed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the text which witnesses to Jesus, namely the Bible. Any strategy that doesn't take the source of revelation seriously is deeply flawed. Correspondingly, any strategy that does take the text seriously is to be commended. The second strategy must involve an interpretation of the text that does not do violence to the text. The linking of Ishmael and Hagar to Islam is centuries old. (See for example the Qur'an Sura 37) The third strategy should celebrate

ambiguity. The mistake Kung makes is that he wants everyone just to 'like' each other. The truth is that engagement across the religious divide will inevitably involve both affirmation and criticism. For those of us committed to bringing peace amongst the religions (to quote the Kung slogan), we recognize it will be a peace that will assume that the other is fundamentally wrong in all sorts of ways. As someone on the left of the political scene, I am committed to peaceful relations with my Republican friends (and on some issues can form a common alliance and learn from them) but I still feel that their underlying commitments are mistaken. So by analogy, the best we can hope for and perhaps all we should strive for is constructive relations which still recognize deep areas of disagreement. The fourth strategy is that an analysis should be 'tradition-constituted'. Kung wants to solve the problem of religious diversity from a transcendent vantage point. (In truth of course he is really imposing his vantage point of liberal modernity— to allude to MacIntyre's argument in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) The illusion and conceit of this project should be repudiated. (It is an illusion to imagine that one can find a transcendent discourse in which problems and difference can be solved; it is a conceit because really it is imposition of the values of the *New York Times* reader on everyone.)

Kepnes achievement is to sketch out a strategy for understanding the other, which meets these four criteria. This is the reason why I enjoyed the paper and admired the achievement so much.

IS SCRIPTURAL REASONING SENSELESS?: A RESPONSE TO STEVEN KEPNES

Martin Kavka

I want to thank Steven Kepnes for offering us two rich texts. First, of course, is the set of passages from Genesis that he has read, very closely, but second is his own commentary. About the Biblical texts I have little to say; Kepnes has taught me a reading of these texts that is so impeccably elegant that anything I will say about these texts from now on will simply repeat things that he has already said. But I do believe that Kepnes has not fully realized what is at stake in his own commentary; its implications do not only have a healing effect for the relationship between the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael, but also for the relationship between these children of Abraham and the world of Western reason, a relationship which Kepnes— like Yamine Mermer in her response to Basit Koshul that appears earlier in this issue— insists on reading as essentially inimical. The depth of Kepnes's reading of the texts on Ishmael and Hagar shows us the messiness of religion in all of its burdensome glory, or its glorious burden (in Hebrew, the words for "weight" and "glory"— *k'vedut* and *kavod*, come from the same linguistic root). How messy is the picture that Kepnes has drawn for us in his very precise reading of the text? It is one in which the Torah is fundamentally about a boundary between one people and its others which is constantly drawn, erased, redrawn, re-erased, etc. It is one in which Hagar— who because she is Egyptian is not Israel— is also Israel because she is the stranger, just as the people of Israel are. And as a result, it is one in which the children of Hagar are both, as Steve put it in his title, others and ourselves.

The relationship between self and other in this text is thus simultaneously one of the deepest intimacy and the denial of that intimacy: I am you! I'm not you! I am you! I'm not you! This is almost too dizzying to respond to. I would like to try and make sense of it, but this is a tall order. On the one hand, if I do try and make sense of it, perhaps using that great sense-making tool called "philosophy," I will perhaps only succeed cleaning up the mess,

and so I will do nothing more than describe something that does not actually exist. On the other hand, it is impossible to revel in the mess, because such a situation does not give any clear orientation. If religion is really just something messy— something senseless— then it becomes far more difficult to articulate why its structures and commands would remain compelling. In short, I am up a tree, as I always am when I am called upon to do theology, as I am at this moment, having been asked to respond to Kepnes's reading of these texts. This is something that I want very much to do, on the one hand because I want to honour a friend, and on the other because ultimate matters are useless if they are foreign to discourse. But for the reasons I have just laid out, this is something that I cannot do. So let me continue by describing one other messy aspect of the structure that Kepnes has laid out.

About halfway through his talk, Kepnes describes his reading of the Hagar and Ishmael narrative as an example of scriptural reasoning. As an act of reasoning based in the particularity of a scriptural text, and thus detached from universalist foundations, Kepnes's paper exemplifies a mode of thinking which for him is at least distinct from Western philosophical reasoning, if not completely opposed to it (because "scripture is not beholden to modern secular standards of … philosophic coherence"). Nevertheless, in his paper, we hear many good things about three philosophers of the twentieth century: the Jewish existentialist Martin Buber, the Jewish rationalist Hermann Cohen, and the founder of American pragmatism Charles Sanders Peirce. Perhaps Kepnes reads these three figures as qualitatively different from a more predominant trend in philosophy. Perhaps he judges Hegel, Kant, and/or Plato, as having deleterious effects which Western philosophy essentially might always risk running, but only achieves in certain times and places. But it is Plato who teaches us in the *Sophist* about the intimacy of the mixing together of categorical kinds.[311] It is Kant who teaches us in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that speculative reason can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God and thereby that philosophy can make room for faith.[312] It is Hegel who argues in the *Philosophy of Right* that the universalism of the state is nothing other than the complete

311 *Sophist* 253b ff.
312 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B xxx.

development of the particular interests of singular persons.[313] Any account of a horizon that is broader than that of the particular (in other words, what passes for "universal") that ends up omitting or abolishing one particular interest, or that refuses to see particular interests as potentially analogous and thus relatable to each other, is therefore on Hegel's account simply incomplete, false, and the result of bad thinking. All of these are points that I believe Kepnes wants to accept, taken apart from whatever Kant or Hegel said about Judaism and Islam, or from the role which people have often assigned to Greek philosophy in putting religion in its alleged subservient place.

I do not make this claim simply because I want to persuade Kepnes that he can be— and already is— friends with someone who has an apparently different view of philosophy than he does. I do it because it is the only way that I can deal with the inability to find analogies between Kepnes's remarks and those that Basit Koshul made earlier today. What has occurred today is that two active members in scriptural reasoning— the act in which members of Abrahamic traditions read each other's sacred texts together— have given quite different accounts of the relationship between scripture and philosophy. Kepnes describes scriptural reasoning as something that is neither fundamentalism nor a "shallow reflection of Enlightenment ideals," but rather some third creature that is definitely neither anything like either pole nor a mixture of the two. On the other hand, Koshul took the messy path of the mixture when he described prophetic witness as both dissenting from as well as affirming the Enlightenment tradition. The relationship between Kepnes's paper and Koshul's comes out best if one considers that Koshul's paper might well have been titled "Enlightenment as our Other, Enlightenment as Ourself"; for Kepnes, Enlightenment is only Other. At such an impasse, it seems that the activity of scriptural reasoning, which both Kepnes and Koshul claim to represent, has no clarity about its aims.

For this lack of clarity, one can only thank God, for it is only out of this lack of clarity that scriptural reasoners can continue to engage the process of giving and asking for reasons as to why they read sacred texts in a particular way. If scriptural reasoners had clarity— in this case, if Kepnes and Koshul

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[313] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, paragraph 260.

had agreed about whether the future of certain religious structures and concepts in the West is secure or not, or if Kepnes and myself were to agree on the relationship between Judaism and Western philosophy— there would be no reason whatsoever to talk to each other. One does not need to speak to someone whom one knows fully; the universality of conceptual reasoning would make speech unnecessary. But why thank God for the ability to talk to each other? To be blunt, this ability participates in the work of redemption. Such a claim, perhaps, will not seem at first blush to be defensible. However, although it may seem amusing to say that a conversation— especially one that ends up seeing print in an academic journal— could have such a redemptive end, I mean it with all seriousness.

The way to defend such a claim is, I think, to narrate briefly what occurs in a scriptural reasoning session. Kepnes illustrated some of these things in his paper. In talking, we ask questions. What is it with this text? What's distinctive about it? What is at stake in the words that it chooses to express its ideas— words that cannot have been whimsically chosen? What do these words mean in other places? Do the narrative details of the text mesh perfectly with each other? What do later authorities say about this text? How do those understandings augment or constrict, harmonize or conflict with, what we think the surface of the text states? How does the text defend its claims? Now these kinds of questions are not in and of themselves anything special; they occur all the time in seminary classrooms, or university classrooms— places that we might not think of as interfaith or even intrafaith scenes. So narrating *what* occurs in scriptural reasoning isn't enough. One must also focus on *who* is asking the questions. More often than not, the people who are asking questions of the texts are foreigners to the texts' logics. This has a very basic consequence, but one that to my mind is key for scriptural reasoning: foreigners ask questions that "natives" have forgotten should be questions at all.[314] Having foreigners— strangers in a land that is not theirs, to bring us back to the text of Genesis 15— read a text with you brings in all that messiness that is easily evaded when one is reading sacred

[314] For example, I have learned the most about modern Jewish philosophy by teaching it in classrooms that are populated mostly with evangelical Christians, because they ask questions that are in their horizon but not mine, and they focus on issues that I never thought about when I learned how to read these books many years ago.

texts only with other natives. The expression of identity in those native contexts is, far more often than one would like, disturbingly smooth; it reflects little more than participants' desires to formulate a religious identity that does not take them too far from the comfort zones of a broader culture.[315]

So focusing on the *who* of scriptural reasoning allows us to see how articulating the messiness of sacred texts— in other words, the odd contours of the relationship between religious identity and a modern identity— displays a key element of why scriptural reasoning is different from apparently similar conversations in other settings. Yet it still remains to ask exactly what is the effect of this messiness that seems to be so constitutive for scriptural reasoning, a messiness that is present in the Book of Genesis (as Kepnes has shown) and duplicated in the attempt to read Koshul and Kepnes together. Here, it is key to reflect on what happens in the encounter with the foreigner who reads your text. All of a sudden, one hears the text approached from new angles— not from beliefs about what does or does not constitute the "fulfilment" of the texts, but with an eye to different textual elements, or from a viewpoint that shows the text in a new light (a strong sense of divine command, perhaps, or a quasi-Marxian attentiveness to the material culture described in a text). This is *lovely*. The questions one was asking shift. No longer is one simply asking what is going on in this text and why. One now is also asking, "How did you learn to read that way? Tell me more about yourself. Stay for awhile." Friendships begin that are not rooted in a pre-determined agreement on the meaning of a certain text. Similarly, as one reads another's text, being led and leading others through it, that tradition— as well as its interpreters who are at the table alongside one— takes on the qualities of loveliness (without undoing participants' commitments to their own traditions). As Nick Adams has perceptively stated in a forthcoming

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[315] Again, I think of some of my students, for whom the difference between the attributes of Jesus of Nazareth and those of Dr. Phil, or, as in a few bizarre cases, between the attributes of Oprah Winfrey and those of Ariel Sharon, appears to be less and less with each passing year. While the fact that I teach in the American South does skew matters somewhat, I believe that my students are signs of a broader current in contemporary America, in which it is philosophy—even "Enlightenment reason"—that now takes the place of the counter-culture.

book, scriptural reasoning involves "acknowledging that God is great: greater than language, greater than traditions, greater than scripture."

We are still not quite at redemption yet, however. Acknowledging that God is great does not necessarily give me confidence that the life of a scriptural reasoner— one that oscillates fitfully between saying "I am you," and "I am not you," as Kepnes so patiently showed— is not a senseless life, a life of madness which might be better described as "doom" than as "redemption." How can one show that this kind of life of intimate relationship betwixt the Abrahamic traditions, and between the Abrahamic traditions and modernity, is any better than the life typified by the clash of civilizations?

Here, it helps to point out that what Adams has said has been said before. The assertion that scriptural study can lead to the acknowledgment of God's transcendence echoes a statement that the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig made in the 1920s: "The unlimited refuses to be organized."[316] Rosenzweig said this in the context of his desire to re-energize Jewish life in Germany through structures of Jewish learning that updated the classical institution of the study-house.[317] Rosenzweig's claim is that the idea that something higher than ourselves (such as religion) could be reduced to an ideological program or a canon of propositions is an absurd one, because by its very nature religion transcends the language we use to talk about it. This means that all we have is a readiness for the heights of religious life— a desire to know what's at stake in proclaiming a religious identity, a desire to be able to articulate cogently the relationship between the parameters of the interior world and the parameters of the exterior one, whether this be the world of the Enlightenment or the world of another religious tradition. In short, all we have is a desire for home, a place where everything is just so. Such a desire cannot possibly be fulfilled by human means; if it could, that would be an act of organizing the unlimited, of violating divine transcendence. So what keeps this desire from collapsing into hopelessness?

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[316] Franz Rosenzweig, "Of *Bildung* there is no end," trans. Michael Zank in Zank, "Franz Rosenzweig, the 1920s and the "moment of textual reasoning," in *Textual Reasonings*, eds. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (London and Grand Rapids, MI: SCM/Eerdmans, 2002), 235

[317] See Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 69–99.

Rosenzweig hints at an answer: "wishes are the messengers of confidence."[318] This is a difficult sentence, perhaps the most difficult sentence in modern Jewish philosophy. I believe it means something like the following. "Wishes" refer to the desire on the part of those who walk into a study-house— or any place in which sacred texts are read— to forge a link to the past that seems to be irrecuperable in the context of modernity. (Rosenzweig saw this only as a problem for German Jews. But today, the problem of how to relate to the West shows itself to be a broadly Abrahamic one.) Neither simply rejecting modernity not simply accepting modernity seem to be options, for the reasons Kepnes laid out at the end of his remarks. "Confidence" is the faith that these wishes can bear fruit, that a home that has its roots in sacred texts and the contemporary world at the same time is really possible. But what of this messenger service to which these wishes belong? Rosenzweig gives a fuller account in a letter to the chemist Eduard Strauss in which he describes a study-room. In reading the quote below, I will purposefully detach it from the specific Jewish context, taking the risk to substitute the word "religious" where Rosenzweig uses the word "Jewish."

> People will be coming, people who, by the very act of coming into the speaking space of the [study room] give testimony to the fact that the religious human being is alive within them. Otherwise they would not come. For the time being, let us ["us" meaning Rosenzweig and Strauss] offer them nothing at all. Let us hearken. And from that hearkening, words will grow. And the words will grow together and be united into wishes. And wishes are the messengers of confidence. Wishes that find each other, human beings that find each other, religious human beings— let us attempt to create what they desire.[319]

The engine of the study room's messenger service would thus appear to be the act of listening. In listening to others, we come to learn that we are not alone in not knowing who we are, and in striving to forge an identity. This is what gives confidence. My desire for home is only a hopeless one if I think that it is only my desire, or only the desire of my narrow community. In

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[318] Rosenzweig, 237.
[319] Ibid.

a claim that only I (or a small we) want something, the object of that desire becomes less secure, for in such a situation, it always remains possible that someone else could come along and render my world completely chaotic by, say, enacting laws or supporting customs that make that pursuit more dangerous or more difficult, and thereby throw my identity and self-image into upheaval. The more people who come together, listen to each other, and recognize the possibility of those chains of reasoning that articulate that desire for home, the fewer outsiders there are to destabilize that identity. In other words, my wish means nothing objectively unless you confirm it for me, by agreeing that I am entitled to be the person that I have committed myself to being.[320] And in order to come to that agreement, we must first listen to what those claims are, and to how people infer the structures and ways of being religious from those texts that they view as sacred. We cannot confirm each other's identities unless we evaluate them, and we cannot evaluate them unless we hearken.

It is important to note that your confirmation that I am entitled to the identity to which I have committed myself is not at all the same thing as your agreeing with what I say. The conversation that takes place in study does not have to lead to convergence on the content of what one believes. Indeed, the conversation that takes place in study can lead to claims in which you show me, through your reading of my texts, how some of my commitments don't mesh with each other. So while conversation does not necessarily lead to convergence, neither is it necessarily a static structure in which the participants cling stubbornly to their identities for dear life.

The act of reading together, or thinking together, performs what the philosopher of language Robert Brandom calls a "game of giving and asking for reasons."[321] In that game (on which everything hangs), there is agreement on what counts as possibly valid claims, and on the validity of the various patterns of reasoning that underlie those claims. But this is all one needs for what Rosenzweig described as confidence. One only needs verification of the

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[320] For more on the co-implication of commitments and entitlements in linguistic practice, see Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 157–80.

[321] Ibid., 230 (to cite one page amongst many).

belief that one's identity is not invalid. When wishes come together, it is only insofar as the desire for a home is something that all participants in the activity of study share. What that home looks like (how it is decorated, so to speak) can be bracketed off. But in recognizing that there is a common striving to articulate in a tidy form how a religious identity, whatever that identity may be, fits in with the contemporary world, people come alive. They come to be more than the faceless attributes and predicates that one might ordinarily ascribe to them from a distance. And in entitling others to their commitments, they— excuse me, *we*— become committed to each other. This gives hope that the possibility to articulate how Abrahamic identities fit into the contemporary world is not a sham, because I am neither alone nor am I only with my co-religionists. But if this is what I have confidence in, then I also have confidence that doom will not and does not necessarily win out over redemption; I have confidence that when time comes to an end, justice will win out. This is what I mean when I say that the ability to talk to each other— to share our wishes and recognize each other as wishing subjects, to recognize the validity of the language in which those wishes are expressed— participates in the work of redemption. Becoming committed ensures that there is a path forward, a path toward something that very well might be an image of redemption or the last things to which I am personally committed.

So in short, we make identities for ourselves in conversation with other people. Finding ourselves at home depends on finding others, and hearkening to them; in the case of scriptural reasoning, this means reading others' sacred texts. Now it is burdensome to need others. But if we only study with people who claim to have the same exact home, the same exact understanding of the text, that we do, then no confidence will result. How will I feel at home in the world if I have the sense that only a narrow group is wishing with me? Therefore, it is necessary to go outside of the realm of who we think of as "ourselves," to others, and talk so that the sense of who we are— wishers, seekers for a home— broadens outside the narrow circle of "ourselves." The need for confidence in the possibility of redemption requires this mixture of the translatability and untranslatability of worldviews that Kepnes has shown to be the primary characteristic of scriptural reasoning.

What I have striven to do is give a fuller explanation of that mix of us and them, ourselves and other, outside and inside, affirmation and critique, that we find in both Kepnes's assertion that Hagar is Israel and Koshul's analysis of the rituals of the Hajj as affirming certain Western Enlightenment values. But the way that I have tried to explain why this occurs— why scriptural reasoning fundamentally lacks clarity— has not been a scripturally-based argument. It could not have been; there was no scriptural basis that was available to me to reconcile the differing views of Kepnes and Koshul without foisting a foreign scriptural context onto one of them. In order to show how each of them works with an analogue of the other's messiness, I needed philosophy, or at least thick empirical description. For this reason, I resist the conclusion that Kepnes has made that scriptural reasoning exists on some conceptual plane that is wholly exterior to Western philosophical reasoning; rather, it seems to me that scriptural reasoning iterates the messiness that is characteristic of part of Western philosophical discourse. One brief example: in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*— so often misunderstood as a one-dimensional account of universalism that erases diversity and plurality— Hegel describes the movement of recognition by which self-consciousness comes to know itself as "the exposition of a spiritual unity in its doubling … a many-sided intersection of a correlation between multiple meanings."[322] The reference to "multiple meanings" shows that the "doubling" in Hegel's account of the self-other relation is not the duplication of a Xerox copy; the language of analogy seems to be closer to what Hegel wants to say.[323] Hegel's articulation of intersubjectivity, like the articulation of a scripturally-based identity, is complex— far more complex than Kepnes's description of the standards of secular philosophic coherence allows. In Hegel, and in scriptural reasoning, both self and other exist as self *and* other, as a member of both "us" *and* "them." There is difference *and* a recognized likeness. Only in this way, by attending to what happens in the conversational dynamic of scriptural reasoning, and thereby coming to see that it is not simply opposed to philosophy but also at one with philosophy, can we make sense of the following three claims: (1) Kepnes's claim that Islam is both the "ourselves" and the "other" of Israel, (2) Koshul's claim that Islam both

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[322] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraph 178. I have used Robert R. Williams's translation in *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 50.

[323] See Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 149–60.

affirms and critiques the West, and (3) both Kepnes and Koshul are scriptural reasoners. Without explaining such messiness in the process of the giving and taking of reasons— in other words, without participating in the discourse of "Western" philosophy— all of these claims are simply contradictory signs, and therefore signs of a fundamental meaninglessness to existence from which there is no good reason to believe we can be redeemed.

But with this explanation, reading scripture together opens itself up as the possibility of a *rapprochement* with the West, since philosophy shows that the "clash of civilizations" model is a bad description of the situation, both in terms of scripture and in terms of philosophy. What is a good analogy of this? At this moment, after listening to Steve, I offer that it is Genesis 21:19: "Then God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water." In reading together, our eyes are opened and we see a source of sustenance that will carry us into the future— others who are not (and are) us. For Hagar is (and is not) Israel, Israel is (and is not) Hagar, and both are (and are not) the West. These are burdensome things to say; history has shown repeatedly how both secularized nations as well as religious communities have failed to bear these truths. But without bearing this burden, and without the philosophical knowledge that this burden makes sense, a glorious future seems to me to be impossible.

SHAYKH ABU BAKR SIRAJ AL-DIN (MARTIN LINGS): A TRIBUTE

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

With the death of Shaykh Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din (1909-2005) the traditionalist school has lost one of its greatest expositors and the world as a whole has lost one of its leading spiritual lights. His long life became extinguished gently but not before his many works, lectures, and most of all spiritual presence and direction illuminated a whole world in both East and West. Highly gifted as a young man for language and literature and also drawn deeply to religion, he became closely associated with C. S. Lewis at Oxford. It was his thirst for universal truth and intelligence for understanding pure metaphysics, however, that caused him to leave the strong influence of Lewis for the pure expression of the perennial philosophy which he discovered in the writings of René Guénon in the 1930s. C. S. Lewis was highly opposed to Guénon, as his collected letters reveal!, and it is to the great credit of the young Lings and his sense of discernment to be able to break the strong spell of the imposing figure of Lewis for what appeared at Oxford as the far away horizons of traditional doctrines. In the late 1980s when we were walking together at his invitation on the Addison Walk at Oxford, Lings began to reminisce about his days at the University and he told me how disappointed Lewis was when the young Lings left Christianity for Islam and the universal verities of Sufism and told Lings, "What a loss for Christianity!" As it was, Lings embraced Islam not to deny but to reconfirm the deepest and oft-forgotten truths of Christianity as his works reveal amply and he made great contributions to that religion.

The discovery of traditional writings was to lead him to the circle of Frithjof Schuon, to the embracing of Islam in 1938 in Switzerland through Titus Burckhardt, and to entry into the path of Sufism. It was shortly before the Second World War that he set out for Egypt where he met Guénon (Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid Yahya) and became closely associated with him, becoming in fact like a member of his household. But what was most important in Lings’ life was that became a disciple of Shaykh ‘Isa Nur al-Din

Ahmad (Frithjof Schuon) to whom he remained extremely devoted and faithful until Schuon's death and even afterwards.

Sidi Abu Bakr, as he was then called, did not only love Islam, the religion which God had chosen for him, but also the Arabic language which he mastered as well as traditional Arab culture. He was at once very English and deeply Arabized on a certain level, but of course his goal was to transcend all forms, those of his ethnic background and those of the religion whose forms he had adopted as the means to ascend to that Reality which is above all forms. He was planning to live in Cairo until the end of his life but the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 forced him to return to England. With all his love for the English countryside and his lovely garden which was in full bloom when he died in May (and where he was buried), he always considered Egypt also to be his home. For the past twenty y! ears we visited Cairo together annually and I always felt that he was as much at home there as he was in his home in Westerham, Kent. Once we were visiting the holy site of Ra's al-Husayn in Cairo, which is the sacred center of the city. As we approached the grill surrounding the tomb of the grandson of the Prophet, he said, "When I am here, I feel that this is where I belong."

Shaykh Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din spent over sixty years in actively following the spiritual path and his whole life was dedicated to God and the way that leads to Him. He traveled regularly in the old days to visit Shaykh 'Isa in Lausanne and later in America and also he would journey extensively throughout the Islamic world on a regular basis from Morocco to Malaysia with the anchor always being Egypt. Gradually his fame grew throughout the Islamic world, even more so than in England and the perfume of his presence is to be sensed even now not only in certain circles in the West, but especially in numerous Islamic countries where many tributes were made to him after his death. Now that he has left this lowly plane for the numinous abode, one might pause to weigh the significance of his writings within the traditional school without forgetting the even more important significance of his spiritual legacy embedded in the hearts and minds of his many disciples, friends and even unknown persons touched by his light from afar. As a Persian poem states,

Do not seek after our death our dust in the earth,

Our tomb is in the breasts of the people of gnosis.

After the three founding figures of the traditionalist school, that is, Guénon, Coomarawamy and Schuon, Lings is without doubt one of the most significant voices of the next circle of this assembly. While being closely drawn to the works of Guénon, one of which he translated into English after the Second World War, Lings was drawn more to the writings of Schuon which he followed scrupulously and assiduously. In comparison to Burckhardt, who was also a major disciple of Schuon, Lings was more attracted to the field of literature and Burckhardt more concerned with cosmological sciences while both made extremely important contributions to Sufi studies. Also Schuon and Burckhardt were both more interested in philosophy than was Lings, while all three were of course deeply immersed in the *sophia perennis*. Schuon was favorable to being called a "Teutonic philosopher" in public. One can hardly imagine Lings accepting to be called an "English philosopher."

Like Schuon and Burckhardt, Lings was also very much interested in traditional art but in a somewhat diverse way. Schuon and Burckhardt were both remarkable painters and designers although in different media while Lings, like Schuon, was a very gifted poet. And in contrast to the other two, Lings was more concerned with literary art as seen in his unparalleled study of Shakespeare. One might say that the artistic genius of Lings oscillated between Quranic calligraphy and English literature as seen in the title of his two most important works on art: *Splendours of Qur'anic Calligraphy and Illumination* (the title of the new edition of this unique work which appeared through the auspices of Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation in 2004) and *The Secret of Shakespeare*. Furthermore, in the context of art one should not forget his splendid poetry contained not only in the *Collected Poems*, but also in the translations of Sufi poetry in the last of his works to appear before his death, *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology*, and in his translation of some of the poems of Shaykh al-'Alawi in *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*. Concerning the latter, Frithjof Schuon, who did not praise things easily, once told me, "This should be a model for the translation of Sufi poetry."

The other works of Shaykh Abu Bakr can be divided into two categories: one dealing with general traditional themes and the other more specifically

with Islam. The first category includes his brilliant and provocative work *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* which is a critique of many of the errors of the modern world following such books as *The Crisis of the Modern World* of Guénon and *Light on the Ancient Worlds* of Schuon and many of their other writings; *Symbols and Archetypes* which reveals his deep interest in symbolism and which summarizes in masterly fashion the traditional doctrine of symbols (he also played a! major role in the English translation of Guénon's *Fundamental Symbols*); *The Eleventh Hour* in which he dealt with eschatological questions about which Schuon did not choose to write publicly; and his very last work, *A Return to the Spirit*, which has not as yet been published. All of these works, along with many articles on diverse traditional subjects, especially symbolism, are among the most precious writings in the traditional cannon.

To the second category belong his first published book, *The Book of Certainty*, a Sufi commentary on many verses of the Qur'an and certain *hadiths*, which has become a classic and is still widely read after over half a century since it was first published; his incomparable biography of the Prophet of Islam, *Muhammad—His Life Based on the Earliest Sources,* which nearly all Muslims consider to be the best biography of the Prophet in a European language and for which he is widely known in the Islamic world; *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, which again is a unique masterpiece; *What is Sufism?*, which is an eloquent and penetrating work dealing with the most profound aspects of the Sufi tradition; and his short, personal and moving essay *Mecca Before Genesis Until Now*. Except for the last work which appeared recently, all the other works in this category are not only known in the West but are also widely appreciated in the Islamic world where many of them have been translated into various Islamic languages. Also again under this category one must mention many articles of the greatest intellectual and spiritual significance.

In the Islamic world Shaykh Abu Bakr was seen as one of the champions of authentic Islam in the West as reflected in the many reports of his death in various Islamic countries. He brought many Muslims back to their own religion and opened their eyes to the spiritual grandeur of Sufism. In Turkey several of his books rendered into Turkish continue to be read by a large audience. In Iran he is practically a household name among scholars and

many of his books which have been translated into Persian remain very popular. A similar situation holds true for Pakistan where the Suheyl Academy has made many of his works available in a local edition in English which is widely read in that land, making translations into Urdu less necessary, although some of the titles have also been rendered into Urdu! . Among other Islamic countries the influence of Shaykh Abu Bakr's works are to be seen particularly in Malaysia and Bosnia.

One would expect that the Arabic zone of Islamic civilization would be where Shaykh Abu Bakr would be best known considering his years of residence in Egypt and frequent later journeys to that country, as well as numerous visits to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and several other Arab countries. But as in the case of other traditional authors, so in his case, less attention has been paid to them than in other major Islamic countries such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan although again a few of Shaykh Abu Bakr's works have been rendered into Arabic. This having been said, it is necessary to state that he was nevertheless well known and highly respected among major Sufi masters and *'ulama'* of al-Azhar in Egypt and also within Sufi circles in other Arab lands, especially the Shadhiliyyah in the Maghrib.

In the West he had many readers among those in search of traditional truth in general and also among the newer generation of Muslims living in the West for many of whom he was the foremost exemplar of a Western Muslim with the virtues which the religion has sought to inculcate in its followers on the basis of the Prophetic model. Hamzah Yusuf, perhaps the foremost and best known American Muslim figure who writes and speaks about Islam, came to Islam when he was only seventeen years old through the writings of Shaykh Abu Bakr and went to visit him shortly before the latter's death. He was deeply impressed by Shaykh Abu Bakr's saintly presence and considered him as the "prototype" of a truly Muslim Westerner.

As for non-Muslims in the West who constitute the majority of his readers, they are of diverse backgrounds and interests. Many are attracted to him as a member of the traditionalist circle, and having read Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt and others have turned naturally to Lings' writings. Others are attracted particularly to his works on Islam and Sufism. It must not be forgotten that he played an important role in bringing many

Westerners to the Sufi tradition and of course to Islam. There is no doubt that there is a distinct Muhammadan *barakah* to his writings. And yet others have been attracted to his poetry and concern for literature. Here his work on Shakespeare has played a unique role. Many people in England know him only through this work which revealed the inner meaning of the plays for the first time to many of the lovers of the Bard and even to major Shakespearean actors.

His long and fruitful association with the circle of Kathleen Raine and the Temenos Academy, of which he was a fellow, was mostly related to this aspect of Lings' interests. He continued to give lectures at the Temenos Academy to practically the end of his life. They were always very well received and were in fact landmark events in the cultural calendar of London. Some of them were attended by HRH The Prince of Wales who was one of his great admirers.

Once I asked Shaykh Abu Bakr why he continued to be so much concerned with Shakespeare. He said that since the English language was now becoming global, the time of Shakespeare had arrived and that it was most important to preserve this language at its peak and in expressions impregnated with the deepest wisdom and traditional teachings. In this way the spread of English would not contribute simply to the impoverishment of various cultures. Indeed he himself sought to keep alive Shakespearean English especially in his poetry and use of the language at the highest level of its possibilities.

The influence of Lings in the West is not confined to the English-speaking world. Many of his works have been translated over the years into French, Italian, Spanish, German and other European languages. He is in fact very well known in various European countries both among those drawn to the study of tradition and within the European Muslim community. Also in recent years his works have played a general role in presenting an authentic and in depth view of Islam for the general European public drawn to this subject and faced at the same time with whole libraries of works which are either shallow or based on ignorance, misinformation or disinformation.

Few have had such a long life devoted to God and the spiritual life and also bearing so much fruit in the form of books, articles and lectures from which the world about them could benefit both intellectually and spiritually as did Shaykh Abu Bakr. His life was totally dedicated to God, the spiritual path and those who sought to walk upon that path. He was indeed what Rumi called *mard-i khuda*, that is, a man of God. In him piety and intelligence, knowledge and love were combined. He was given the gift of speaking eloquently and of writing eloquently. He left behind many works of unusual light and beauty combined with scholarly and intellectual rigor, works that *will continue to emanate grace. But his most beautiful work was the shaping of his own soul over whose perfection he had worked assiduously during a very long life. Finally he was able to present this most important of his efforts to God. May God be pleased with him and make His Mercy to descend upon him. Radi Allah" 'anhu".*

Thou Hast Departed

How sad to hear that thou hast departed,

Leaving this lowly world for the luminous beyond.

Thy gentle voice, uttering words of wisdom slowly.

Deliberately like honey being gently poured,

Not to be heard again in this transient realm.

Nor thy writings new to be beheld by eager eyes,

Accustomed to the outpouring of pearls of wisdom,

From thy gracious pen for decades on end.

How in days of old we circumambulated the Ka'bah.

And wandered amidst the turquoise blue mosques of Isfahan.

How we paid homage to the saints of Marrakesh,

Walking in remembrance to those sacred sites away hidden.

How oft we visited holy places in Cairo and celebrated His Glory,

On continents stretching from East to West.

These joyous moments are to be no more here below,

How sad then to hear that thou hast departed.

And yet joyous it is indeed to recall thy long life,

A life so rich, bearing so much spiritual fruit,

That has nourished souls from near and far.

Thou hast departed but thy words and memories remain,

Etched on the tablet of our hearts, on the substance of our souls.

Dear friend of God, may the doors of His Grace upon thee open.

May we again by the Kawthar *meet, if He wills.*

There to contemplate in harmony the infinite Beauty,

The dazzling Splendor of the Face of <u>*the*</u> *Friend.*

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Key Biscayne, Florida

May 13, 2005

Written a day after the death of Shaykh Abu Bakr, Siraj al-Din al-Shadhili, al-Darqawi, al-'Alawi, al-Maryami—*radi Allahu 'anhu*—to whom this poem is dedicated.

THE SCHOLAR POET SH. ABU BAKR SIRAJ AL-DIN (DR. MARTIN LINGS)

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

Shaykh Abu Bakr has torn off the cloak of hismortal frame and flown to the Friend. A spirit that has now been freed from the chains of bodily existence, and has re-entered the home from which it had but briefly departed. ***Inna li'Laah wa Inna ilayhi raji'un.*** After a long life of unswerving devotion to the Sacred, he passed away to the abode of peace on the 11th May 2005 at the age of 96. The Iqbal Academy Pakistan wants to expresses its condolences to all his admirers. It is personal loss to me. These are the words that are expected to be said when one is writing about the demise of such a renowned and illustrious man of letters as Shaykh Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din known as Dr Martin Lings. But when I utter these words they take on a special and in a sense unique personal significance since it was because of his books that I am "known in the gates when *I* sit among the elders of the land". However it is not the details of his books that I intend to present to you at the present. These details along with his brief CV are appended to this obituary. I would rather say a few words about the insights that inform and the spirit that infuses his works. With this end in view I have taken as my point of departure a poem that was written 72 years ago. Early in his life Dr Martin Lings made a prayer which is now included in his *Collected Poems*. It provides us with a rare insight into his personality and sums up the direction and content of his entire life work.

Many have sought what now I seek, and few have won;

Yet not the less I am driven to pray: pause in thy fleeing

While I have breath, and call to me, and lead me on

Into that garden where the Muses sing and dance,

That I may fill mine ears with sound, mine eyes with seeing.

And make for men some deep enduring utterance.

And the *deep enduring utterance* he has made indeed and we take this as the author's avowal of an intention which lies behind not only his poems but all that he has written on Islam, Sufism, spirituality and religion.

This intention was coupled with another insight: In the West human intelligence, generally speaking, had come to be left out of religion. It no longer participates in the things of the spirit, and in what ever he wrote, Dr Martin Lings was acutely conscious of the need to express spiritual truths in such a way as to win back the intelligences of virtually intelligent men and women for the only object that could truly satisfy them, namely Divine Reality, the Object for which intelligence exists. This is what he has tried to do through his works in a world increasingly rife with heresy and pseudo-religion with the keen awareness that "Knowledge saves only on condition that it enlists all that we are… Metaphysical knowledge is sacred. It is the right of sacred things to demand of man all that he is." Hence Comprehension, Concentration, Conformation.

It is thus that we sense, in the books of Dr Martin Lings, the imprint of his own unmistakable, elegant style, a certain flavour or taste (*dhawq*), bespeaking a particular spirit or inspiration. Reading his books, one is struck both by the unshakable certitude that pervades them, and by the almost tangible sense of the author's own effacement in the truths he so eloquently articulates. In the writings of Martin Lings one feels an intellectual power delivered with a certain lightness of touch: the books therefore express in their own way that combination of spiritual authority and profound humility that so distinctly marks his personality, and so deeply impresses itself upon all those who have the privilege of coming within the sphere of his influence.

His works could be divided into two categories. There are certain works which clearly fall into the category of commentary upon, and introduction to, the writings of the earlier sages and the writers in the perennialist school: such works as *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, *Symbol and Archetype*, and *The Eleventh Hour*. Then there are books which are the result of the application of the principles of the perennial wisdom (*sophia perennis*) to

specific delimited fields, marking his own particular affinities and, indeed, genius. It is in this category of works that his books have excelled all other comparable works. First and foremost one must mention his magisterial account of the life of the Prophet; then his revealing book on Shakespeare's plays; his work *The Qur'anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* is also second to none; and we would also include in this category his book on *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, Shaykh al-Alawi*, arguably the finest biography of a Sufi in the English language. In the words of a reviewer:

> "In reading Dr Martin Lings' *Muhammad*, we detect an alchemical effect in his narration and composition which so evenly combines scholarly accuracy with poetic passion. Lings is scholar poet."
>
> What his book on the Prophet did for one's understanding of the phenomenon of prophethood, Martin Lings' book on the Shaykh al-'Alawi, one might say, did for that of sanctity in Islam.

The Book of Certainty, a little gem which refracts for us some of the most essential elements of Sufi gnosis based on traditional Qur'anic esoteric exegesis. *The Eleventh Hour*, the urgency of the need for spiritual action is particularly stressed. Here we are given not simply an explanation of The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in the Light of Tradition and Prophecy', as the subtitle of the book promises; we are also shown how the current crisis, severe and far-reaching though it is, sows the seeds of its own undoing, at least insofar as the individual is concerned.

It might be said about the books on Islam written by Dr Martin Lings that through these books one is given a series of particularly potent "doses" of the concentrated essence of the religion. The key for comprehending the Islamic works of our author taken as a whole— whether it be the Qur'an, the Prophet, Sufi saints, Sufi doctrines — whatever be the subject at hand, his manner of treating this subject always carries the reader from the realm of forms to that of the Essence, from the particular to the Universal, from the symbol to the Archetype.

This brings me to mention that in his first book on Sufism, written many years ago, Dr Martin Lings wrote, with reference to the Qur'anic

descriptions of the celestial Gardens: "To speak of the Gardens and Fountains of paradise, as also of its Rivers, Fruits and Consorts, is to speak the Truth, whereas to speak of such blessings in this world is only a manner of speaking, for the Realities are in Heaven and what we see here-below are only the remote shadows of Reality." He adds: "The shadow returns to the Substance and, for those with eyes to see, but best things of this world— and that is the criterion of their excellence— are already as it were winged for return to their celestial Source. It is the function of art, in portraying earthly objects, to portray mysteriously at the same time something of their 'wings' and thus make the *deep enduring utterances.*

Dr Martin Lings prayed for making the *deep enduring utterance* in 1932. Centuries ago, Milton in his *Paradise Lost* (Book II-17; Book III –51) wrote of a vision which would then be translated into poetry. Milton's verses are strongly reminiscent of what I quoted earlier from Dr Martin Lings.

And chiefly thou O Spirit, that dost prefer /Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,

Instruct me, for thou know'st: / So much the rather thou celestial light

Shine inward and the mind through her powers / irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence

Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight. [324]

Curriculum Vitae

Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj ad Din) was born at Burnage, Lancashire, in 1909. After taking a degree in English at Oxford in 1932 he spent a year in Poland giving English lessons and then was made lecturer in

[324] John Milton, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Mass., USA, 1941, p. 155 and 199.

Anglo-Saxon and Middle English at the University of Kaunas in Lithuania. He entered Islam in 1938. After four years he went to Egypt and was given a lectureship in English Literature at Cairo University where he lectured mainly on Shakespeare. In 1952 he returned to England and became once more an undergraduate, this time at London University, where he took a degree in Arabic, From 1970-74 he was Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books at the British Museum (in 1973 his department became part of the British Library) where he had also been in special charge of the Arabic manuscripts and printed books since 1955. He was consultant to the World of Islam Festival, 1976. He has written extensively on Islam and allied themes. He is widely travelled and has participated in various Islamic conferences form time to time. He is Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and member of its council and also a member of the British Museum Society.

His publications include, *The Book of Certainty* (the Sufi Doctrines of Faith, Vision and Gnosis), *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions, The Secret of Shakespeare, What is Sufism?,* the splendidly illustrated *Summits of Islamic Calligraphy and Illumination, Collected Poems*, and *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi* which has been translated into Arabic, French, Persian and Urdu. His *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, first published in 1983 has been internationally acclaimed as a masterpiece. He is also the author of several articles for the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, of the article on Sufism in the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the chapter on *Sufism* in the Cambridge University publication *Religion in the Middle East*, of the chapter on Sufi poetry in volume 2 of the *New Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* and numerous articles for *Studies in Comparative Religion* and *The Islamic Quarterly*.

PUBLICATIONS

Muhammad— his Life Based on the Earliest Sources

Before the appearance of this book, Western languages lacked almost entirely a comprehensive and authentic account of the life and the Prophet

Muhammad. Now, Lings, has produced a superb narrative that, in its sobriety and dignity of style and its scrupulous and exhaustive fidelity to authentic and reliable sources, constitutes a major addition to Islamic literature in English.

Religious Studies Review

Martin Ling's Life of Muhammad is unlike any other. Based on Arabic sources of the eighth and ninth centuries, of which some important passages are translated here for the first time, it owes the freshness and directness of its approach to the words of the men and women who heard Muhammad speak and witnessed the events of his life.

Martin Lings has an unusual gift for narrative. He has adopted a style which is at once extremely readable and reflects both the simplicity and grandeur of the story. The result is something that can be read with equal enjoyment by those already familiar with Muhammad's life and those coming to it for the first time.

A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century

"Almost a prerequisite for any serious study of Sufism in European languages': this was the verdict of Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his review of the first edition of this book (*A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century*). According to the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, it is 'one of the most thorough and intimately engaging books on Sufism to be produced by a Western scholar'. Certainly there is nothing second-hand about it. The author lets the Sufis speak for themselves and, in a series of unusual and absorbing texts mainly translated from the Arabic, he gives a vivid picture of life in a North African Sufi order. Against this background stands the unforgettable figure of the Algerian Shaykh who was head of the order from the death of his Master in 1909 until his own death in 1934. The last few chapters are mainly devoted to his writings, which include some remarkable mystic poems. For this second edition the author has added two well-documented chapters which throw new light on the teaching and personality of the Shaykh.

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'A masterly study of a man whose sanctity recalled the golden age of medieval mystics. In this well document book Dr Lings draws on many rare sources... and has made some important original contributions; in particular I know of no more lucid and convincing interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's much debated "pantheistic philosophy".

A. J. Arberry

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"Martin Lings lets above all the sources speak for themselves. But what he adds by way of commentary is of the greatest significance and may serve as a key to a deeper understanding of Islam as a whole'.

Titus Burckhardt

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'A precious document not only for students of Islam but for all who are attracted to spiritual matters. Almost a prerequisite for any serious study of Sufism in European languages'.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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"One of the most thorough and intimately engaging books on Sufism produced by a Western scholar."

Journal of *New Eastern Studies*

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What is Sufism?

What do the Sufis believe? What do they aim at? What do they do? Unlike other writers on the subject, Martin Lings treats all three questions with equal justice. He is thus able to give a wealth of answers to the main question,

What is Sufism? Each answer being from a different angle but all going to the root of the matter. Here are two examples.

> ***'Nearly 1000 years ago a great Sufi defined Sufism as "taste", because its aim and its end could be summed up as direct knowledge of transcendent truths, such knowledge being, insofar as its directness is concerned, more comparable to the experience of the senses than to mental knowledge.***
>
> ***'Most Western readers of this book will have heard quite early in life that "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you". They will also have heard: "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you". But how many of them have ever received any instruction in the way of seeking or in the art of knocking? And even as these last four words were being written down, it came to mind that they are, in this given context, an answer to the very question put by our title'.***

What is Sufism? not only fills the need for a clear and reliable introduction to Sufism, but it is also unique in its thoroughness, and authoritative.

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Martin Lings knows his subject thoroughly and intimately and it has always been a characteristic of his writings that he goes straight to the heart of his subject. In his careful explanation of what Sufism is and, just as important, what it is not, he brings to bear both a profundity of understanding rare among modern writers, and also an uncompromising insistence on many aspects of Sufism which are usually brushed aside. The book plays a double role: it is both an excellent "introductory" work and a direct reflection of certain states from which a real answer might be given to the question' What is Sufism? Concise, illuminating and authoritative, it has the taste of *tasawwuf* to such an extent that to read it is like an anticipatory participation in the very subject matter itself.

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The Book of Certainty

"Our aim has been to express in the language of Sufism some of the universal truths which lie at the heart of all religions. Each chapter serves as a commentary upon some verse or verses of the Qur'an. The book is also based on various sayings of the Prophet, and to a certain extent upon a Qur'anic commentary attributed to Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi. As regards other influences, the reader will notice that many points of doctrine are introduced simply with the words "They say" or "It is said." These words are to be taken quite literally for it must be remembered that Sufism is a living tradition and that a great part of Sufi teaching is unwritten and even anonymous. The same truths have been passed down from Master to disciple for generation after generation; and without the help of such oral teaching this book could never have been written."

The publishers claim this volume to be "the first authentic modern account of Sufi teaching written "from within". Every page bears out this claim, for the author is steeped in the esoteric teaching of the Sufi Shaykhs …. It is both enjoyable and instructive to peruse this little volume.

Prof. A. J. Arberry

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This book is an excellent introduction to Sufism, highly intelligent, balanced, lucid well written and in places really eloquent. It will stimulate advanced students of Sufism to fresh thinking. It is worth a careful perusal. Islamic Culture

Hyderabad-Deccan

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Abë Bakr Siraj ad-Din has bestowed upon the world a great benefaction in giving in this very important Sufi treaties, for belonging as it does to our own time, it is easier for us to assimilate than are the treatises and commentaries of the Sufis of old, and it may thus serve as a bridge between us and them.

***Islamic Quarterly*, London**

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There are indeed few works known to the author of this review which, in so small a space and in a manner so vivid and so free from abstruseness, have been able to present the basic ideas required by one minded to engage in the spiritual course with full intent and not merely out of that passing interest which stops short at theory.

Marco Pallis in *France-Asia*

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The Qur'anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination

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Symbol and Archetype

What is Symbolism? The answer to this question has been known to change altogether a man's life; and ignorance of it can reasonably be said to have produced all the gravest problems of our times. With reference to the great religions of the world, and in particular to Christianity and Islam, Martin Lings here gives us the answer in the clearest terms, with an unusually wide scope of illustration, a versatility to which the list of chapter headings bears some witness. At one point we are gripped by the universal message of four old Lithuanian songs which speak to us, in the language of symbols, from a remote antiquity; at another we are with the Queen of Sheba at her deeply symbolic meeting with Solomon, as recounted in the Qur'an. The central theme is man, stripped of his subhuman excrescences and re-endowed with his infinitely precious primordial heritage and the reader is quickly impelled to identify himself with that centre. Nor is it only his intelligence that impels him, for the further we read, the more we renew our deeply ingrained consciousness that everything— numbers, elements, senses, colours etc.— has a vertical dimension that gives it a divine significance; and this awareness brings with it an existential sense of that dimension in ourselves.

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Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions

This book strikes at the root of almost every thing that makes it difficult for the present-day European to believe whole-heartedly in religion, and in doing so it shows modern man to be, in his own peculiar twentieth- century way, the embodiment of superstition in its most dangerous form. "We are faced in the modern world with a situation similar to that in the fable of the Emperor's new clothes. What is necessary more than anything else is simply that someone should speak the truth; and that is precisely what this book does."

Studies in Comparative Religion

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The author argues in this book that man's diminished faith in religion is further undermined by his attempt to accommodate religion to his modern outlook. He believes that faith can only be restored by dispelling this illusion which prevents man's intelligence from seeing religion as it really is. Modern man is just as superstitious, in a twentieth century way, as more primitive individuals. Modern superstitions are also more virulent and dangerous than earlier ones. Martin Lings centres his interest on the Christian faith, but he also draws upon his wide knowledge of many other religions. *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* is a powerful, simple and readable defence of religion.

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The Eleventh Hour

Martin Lings give us form the outset powerful reasons for believing that we have no reached a point in time from which 'the end'— what ever that may mean —is already in sight without being immediately imminent. In other words, we are now at an hour, which is neither the tenth nor the twelfth. He reminds us however that according to the most ancient traditions the 'twelfth hour' will mark the conclusion, not of time as a whole, but of one of the

great cycles of four ages, which will be followed by another such cycle; and he argues that what Judaism, Christianity and Islam call 'the end of the world' can be understood in the same non-absolute way, for the concept of the Millennium, which is clearly the equivalent of the new Golden Age of the next cycle of time, is to be found in all there monotheistic religions, bringing them into line, in this respect, with Hinduism, Greco-Roman Antiquity, and Buddhism. Within this framework, he analyses first of all the negative aspects of the modern world, then its positive aspects, showing it to be, all things considered, far worse and yet far better than is generally supposed. The future is touched on no more than briefly, but our attention is drawn to a considerable weight of prophetic evidence that we are on the brink of a world-wide devastation, not total, but none the less of cataclysmic proportions, and not final because it is to be 'before the end'. But despite these 'days of destruction', after which a brief positive aftermath is also predicted, and despite some of the appalling evils of the present which are brought home to us here as perhaps never before, we think that most readers of this book will conclude that the advantages of being alive at this crucial moment of human history outweigh the disadvantages.

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The Secret of Shakespeare

"Refreshing and invigorating…it should be on every bookshelf of real lovers of the real Bard.

Sir Donald Wofit

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"This short book says more to reveal or suggest what in Shakespeare is the quintessence of his greatness than the most laborious exposition could ever do."

Kathleen Raine