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THE WORD OF GOD—THE BRIDGE
BETWEEN HIM, YOU AND US

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr

ABSTRACT

The common word means not only the acceptance of Divine Unity but also attachment to the One with our whole being and therefore including love of the One and moreover the love of His creation or the neighbor for the neighbor comes from the One and returns to It. Consequently, one can say that not only Divine Unity is a common word between us and you but that there is also a single *kalimah* or Logos in its principal reality in which we believe jointly except that for you the Word is identified with Christ and for us with the Qur'an. It would bring us closer to each other if we realize that we are bound together not only by the doctrine of the One but also by the "doctrine of the Word". Needless to say different understandings of *kalimah* or *logos* have existed also within each tradition as we see in the formulation of different types of Christology and also different understandings of the meaning of the Qur'an as Word of God. In this context of similarities and contrasts we each follow the teachings of a religion that claims to have a universal message for the whole of humanity. For the purpose of our present discourse in the same way that it is not necessary to enter into contentious theological discussions about the nature of God. To live fully as a Muslim or Christian does not require anything less of us than loving the neighbor, whether he or she be Muslim or Christian, and to ask not "is he or she one of us," but "is he or she one of His."

Say, O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God, and shall not associate aught with Him, and shall not take one another as lords apart from God. (Qur'ān, 3:65)

The common word to which the chapter of the Qur'an "The House of 'Imrān" refers and from which the title of the document "A Common Word between Us and You" has been taken has been interpreted by such major traditional commentators as Zamakhshahrī, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Ibn 'Arabī as referring to Divine Unity or *al-Tawhīd*. Surely this is its basic meaning as the Unity of the Divine Principle is what is common between all the Us's and all the You's who follow the sacred teachings at the heart of all authentic religions. The common word means not only the acceptance of Divine Unity but also attachment to the One with our whole being and therefore including love of the One and moreover the love of His creation or the neighbor for the neighbor comes from the One and returns to It. The common word stated in the Qur'an contains, therefore, within itself implicitly the two commandments of Christ announced in chapter 12 of the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament. The consequence of our realization of our ontological dependence upon the One as absolute regarding Him and also regarding what issues from Him in light of the ontological dependence of all of creation upon Him cannot but include His two commandments.

There is furthermore a second possible interpretation of "the common word" which can bring you and us, or more particularly Christians and Muslims, even closer together by embracing the instrument or the means by which the One has revealed Himself to all of us, Christian and Muslim alike. The second interpretation has to do with the meaning of the term "word" itself. In the original Arabic of the verse from "The House of 'Imrān" the term that is used is *kalimah*. Now the Noble Qur'an is known among Muslims as *kalām Allah* or *kalimat Allah* meaning literally Word of God while the term is also used in connection with Moses and Jesus. It is precisely this term that corresponds to the word *logos* in Christian Greek sources contrary to what some have claimed the doctrine of the *logos* exists as much in Islam as it does in Christianity albeit with different interpretations resulting from the different receptacles for which a religion is meant and also the diversity of Divine

manifestations. As Islamic sources assert, *kullu yawmin Huwa fi 'l-sha'n*, that is, “every day He manifests Himself in a different state.” Furthermore, while the Gospel of John asserts that it was by the Word that all things were made, the chapter *Yā Sin* in the Qur’an exclaims that God said “be!” (*kun*) and there was. There is therefore again a similarity of cosmogonic function in the two religions as far as the Word is concerned.

Consequently, one can say that not only Divine Unity is a common word between us and you but that there is also a single *kalimah* or Logos in its principal reality in which we believe jointly except that for you the Word is identified with Christ and for us with the Qur’an. It would bring us closer to each other if we realized that we are bound together not only by the doctrine of the One but also by the “doctrine of the Word” if we fix our gaze upon the metahistorical and principal Word/Logos and not upon one of its particular historical manifestations. There *were*, however, particular manifestations of this reality and hence the creation of Christianity and Islam, as well as other religions, especially Judaism if we confine ourselves within the Abrahamic family of religions, religions in which there are universal elements that unify and bind and formal aspects and particularities that separate. Needless to say different understandings of *kalimah* or *logos* have existed also within each tradition as we see in the formulation of different types of Christology and also different understandings of the meaning of the Qur’an as Word of God.

Obviously the common word as related to Divine Unity followed by the Word as *kalimah* or *Logos* in its metaphysical sense and the resulting love of God and neighbor are the most important elements that unify and bind us together. The traditional Catholic credo begins with *credo in unum Deum* which conveys the same meaning as *la ilāha Wallāh*. Furthermore, we both accept the revelatory agency of the Word, however different might be our understanding of the form that the Word taken in this world and our interpretation of the process of revelation itself. From this similarity of doctrine issues the role played by Christ in Christianity as the perfect model to emulate, hence *imitatio Christi* and the similar role played by the Prophet, the recipient of the Divine Word in Islam and the most perfect of men for Muslims although not considered as divine.

The list of similarities that bind us on the basis of these basic doctrines and that bring Christians and Muslims close together are too many to enumerate here. But let us mention just a few: acceptance of sacred scripture, belief in the reality and pre-eminence of the Spirit within and in the spiritual world beyond our

subjectivism, the immortality of the soul, the efficacy of prayer and other religious rites, the necessity of the ethical character of human life here on earth and its consequences for life after death, ultimate judgment by God and eschatological realities, the reality of good and evil, interplay of the Mercy and Justice of God, the reflection of the Wisdom of God in His creation, and the existence of a path in this life to march towards God as seen in the mysticism of the two religions. Even in matters of the relation of faith to reason, Christianity and Islam have developed many parallel doctrines. In fact in contrast to what some Christian sources have asserted, there is a Muslim parallel practically for *every* Christian position on the issue from Tertullian, St. Augustine, Anselm, and St. Thomas to Calvin and Luther and more recently Barth and Tillich and vice versa. When one ponders over even this incomplete list of shared elements, one becomes aware of how many basic doctrines and practices do indeed unite us especially if our religions were to be compared to what is held to be central in secular society. Nor can one side accuse the other of being opposed to the use of reason in matters of religion or lacking love.

Of course there are also walls that separate us. Otherwise Islam and Christianity would not have survived as separate religions as they have done providentially but the two seas would have commingled into a single ocean. God's Will seems to have commanded otherwise. In the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rumī God addresses Moses and says, "Thou hast come to unify and not to separate." Surely, our task today and tomorrow is to follow this command but we cannot simply neglect the differences by pretending they do not exist. We hope that the common word between us and you will bring us closer together not because differences do not exist but in spite of their existence. As Frithjof Schuon once said, "Accord between religions is not possible in the human atmosphere but only in the Divine stratosphere." Our hope is that while being aware of the human atmosphere where different religious ideas and forms do exist willed by God, we can ascend through the love and knowledge of God and also sapience to the stratosphere where we can reach accord.

Meanwhile in this human atmosphere where we reside we see such apparently insurmountable differences as the emphasis of Islam on Divine Unity and negation of Trinity (at least as understood in the Qur'ān) and the Christian emphasis on the Trinity which is even transposed into the domain of Unity itself. We disagree on the episodes at the end of the life of Christ and of course his divinity in contrast to his being a major prophet of God. We do not see eye to eye about the relation between canonical law and secular law on the

one hand and *al-Shari'ah* and *al-qānun* on the other. While much of our ethics is similar we do have different views concerning sexuality and its relation to original sin, that is central to much of Christian thought but rejected by Islam.

In this context of similarities and contrasts we each follow the teachings of a religion that claims to have a universal message for the whole of humanity and this claim has played no small role in the long history of animosity between the two religions. It has led to religious wars, crusades, coercive missionary activity and much else that has colored and still colors the relation between the two religions. Christians accuse Muslims of violence without paying attention to their own history and to what the Native Americans of New England would have said about the relation of Christianity to violence had they survived to attend this conference. Muslims accuse Christians of not paying enough attention to the social teachings of religion based on justice while not pointing out sufficiently the unjust practices that go on in parts of the Islamic world. A number of people on both sides also tend to paint the other with the color of an extremist fringe, Christians using terrorism and Muslims the blasphemy against Islam, the Qur'ān and the Prophet and what has come to be known more generally as Islamophobia. Needless to say both terrorism in the Islamic world and Islamophobia do remain real but they do not determine the whole reality of Islamic-Christian understanding. Meanwhile, both sides accuse the other of not practicing what they preach.

Yes, these and many other impediments that have to be confronted head on and not simply ignored. On the social and political levels the two religions have to be also self-critical of their own societies and not simply surrender to the political forces of the two worlds in which they form a majority. On the theological level there must be in-depth dialogue if more external issues are to be solved. Without truth religious dialogue becomes simply political expediency and it is then better to leave it in the hands of diplomats rather than committed scholars of religion and theologians. Deep theological dialogue does not necessarily mean the surrender of one side to the other; it does, however, mean better understanding of the other and greater mutual respect. At least one can agree to disagree rather than casting anathema upon the other side. Of course the ideal would be to transcend the formal order altogether to reach the transcendent truth of which theological doctrines are so many crystallizations. That truth resides in the world of meaning beyond forms, in what Rūmi calls the "spiritual retreat of God." But until we get there we must be able to come together, to know each other, to

love one another, and to face together the many challenges posed by a world based on the forgetfulness of God. And it is precisely in this situation that a common word between us and you can play such a crucial role if there is sincerity and correct intention on both sides.

In light of a long history of contentions and confrontations, of theological differences irreducible on the theological level and the need to realize this fact, and of the unprecedented global crisis in which accord or discord between religions has become crucial, it becomes clear why the common word between us and you is of such significance. Surely “the common word” is a most efficacious way to bring about amity between Christianity and Islam without either side sacrificing the truth upon which it stands. And what can be more important to a religion than truth without which religion divorces itself from its very source. Did not Christ call himself the Truth and reference is made to God in the Qur’ān as *al-Haqq*, the Truth? It is of the utmost importance for us assembled here to realize that “the common word” that we are asked to accept and share does not at the same time demand of us to forgo the truth or to relativize it in the name of religious accord as happens in so much of the shallow ecumenism prevalent today that is willing to sacrifice truth for the sake of expediency.

The necessity of acceptance of the two commandments of the love of God and of the neighbor on the basis of the saying of Christ and hence Christian truth is evident to Christians. As for Muslims, the two principles are mentioned in the Qur’ān and *Hadith* and their acceptance is therefore necessary and is moreover seen by Muslims to be based solidly on Islamic teachings. Furthermore, it must be remembered that according to Islamic beliefs what has been brought by an earlier prophet and not explicitly abrogated by a later revelation still stands as an expression of truth and God’s commandment to and will for Muslims. In light of this belief, the two commandments of Christ are also commandments for Muslims even if they had been neither confirmed nor abrogated in the Qur’ān and *Hadith*. Christ is after all not only the founder of Christianity, but also a major Islamic prophet.

Coming now to the meaning of the two commandments, three related issues come to mind and need to be explained: the meaning of God, the meaning of love and the meaning of the love of God and neighbor. Without some accord on these issues, we would be attacked by those who stand against mutual harmony and comprehension on the subject of the very terms we are using in “the common word.” There are already those on the Christian side who assert that the Christian God is not the same as Allah, who is an

Arabic lunar deity or something like that. Such people who usually combine sheer ignorance with bigotry should attend a Sunday mass in Arabic in Bethlehem, Beirut, Amman or Cairo and see what Arabic term the Christians of these cities use for the Christian God. Nor is God simply to be identified with a member of the Christian Trinity as part of three divinities that some Muslims believe wrongly that Christians worship. Allah or God is none other than the One God of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. In speaking of the love of God, let us not accuse each other of referring to different gods. How can one study the Bible, including both the Old and the New Testament, and the Qur'ān, without accepting that we are all breathing throughout all the worlds created by these sacred scriptures within the same universe of Abrahamic monotheism? What could be more insidious or even demonic than trying to undercut the binding effect of Christ's two commandments by claiming that Christians and Muslims are referring to two different gods and not the single God "whose mercy embraces all," as the Qur'ān asserts?

As for love, it is a reality that transcends whatever one writes about it. As Rūmī said, when it came to love the pen broke and the ink dried. And yet so much has been written about the subject. One can either write nothing or fill libraries about love but finally one must experience love to know what it is. Love attaches the lover to the beloved, carries the lover through dales and valleys of joy and sorrow and finally leads to a union that is also a kind of death for *amor est mors*. The love of God is not only the highest form of love but in reality the only love of which all other loves are but shadows. To love God fully is to give ourselves wholly to Him, body, soul and mind not to speak of will and intelligence. We must give up our limited ego as that which defines us. The end of such love is what the Christian mystics call mystical union and to which Sufis refer in a somewhat different language but concerning the same reality as being consumed by the fire of love as a moth is immolated by the divine flame of the divine candle.

For the purpose of our present discourse in the same way that it is not necessary to enter into contentious theological discussions about the nature of God, there is no need to enter into an analysis of the modes, stages and states of love. Let us love God and leave the mystery of this attachment of each soul to its Creator to the Creator Himself. At all costs we should avoid considering our love of God to be superior to the love of the other for God. Such an illusory contention arises from our mistaking our own understanding of the love for God for that love itself and absolutizing that

understanding and of thereby inflating our egos in the guise of religious devotion and righteousness. Let us love God and leave Him to decide on the intensity and sincerity of our loves as well as of our differing views of Him. The Qur'ān invites Muslims explicitly to live at peace with followers of other religions and let God decide on the Day of Judgment concerning the truth or falsehood of wherein they differed.

As for the love of the neighbor, this command has been understood in a different manner over the ages. Today, it cannot include only our Muslim neighbor for Muslims, Christian neighbors for Christians or Jewish neighbors for Jews. It must also include followers of other religious communities, even non-religious communities and especially the non-human world. In fact if Muslims and Christians, not to speak of other groups, do not extend their love of the neighbor to the natural world, the consequences of the environmental crisis caused in fact by the lack of love of the neighbor in its larger reality will make other efforts more or less irrelevant.

The Qur'ān asserts that God created all of humanity from a single soul (*nafs wāhidah*). Nevertheless, strife even within a single family not to speak of between religions and nations continues to manifest itself. One might say that as a result of what Muslims call the fall (*hubūt*) and Christians original sin the state of confrontation and strife is endemic to the human condition. But God has also given us the means of transcending the abode of strife for one of peace, of overcoming that religious and ideological exclusivism which now endangers human existence in favor of that inclusivism of which we gathered here are partisans.

It is not, however, enough to speak of a common word between us and you or even to accept its tenets with our tongue. We must also have the correct intention and live these commandments within ourselves while setting examples for others. Let us love God with all our being which means also to accept His Unity and the unity of His Word that unite us. And let us love the neighbor, and more specifically our Muslim and Christian neighbors, not on the basis of mere sentimentality which can weaken or strengthen in time but on the never changing foundation of the Truth.

To live fully as a Muslim or Christian does not require anything less of us than loving the neighbor, whether he or she be Muslim or Christian, and to ask not “is he or she one of us,” but “is he or she one of His.”

DO MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS BELIEVE
IN THE SAME GOD?

Dr. Reza Shah Kazemi

ABSTRACT

Muslims and Christians do indeed believe in the same God. It can be substantiated with the help of two chief sources: the revealed data of the Qur'an, and the inspired data of the mystics of both Christianity and Islam. The Qur'an—and the Sunna or Conduct of the Prophet, which is an eloquent commentary thereon—provides us with irrefutable evidence that the supreme Object of belief and worship is God for both Muslims and Christians, even if the conceptions of God held by Muslims and Christians diverge and, at points, contradict each other. The God in whom Muslims and Christians believe is one and the same; here, the stress must be placed on the Object of belief, rather than the subject thereof: if 'belief' be defined principally in terms of the divine Object rather than the human subject, then our answer to the question posed will be in the affirmative. The positions of exclusivist and universalist are open to the Muslim who acknowledges that Christians believe in the same God as do Muslims. To the extent that exclusivist theological tendencies prevail, this acknowledgment will be joined to an invitation (*da'wa*) to embrace Islam, thereby replacing an ambiguous, theologically formulated dogma of the Trinity with an unambiguous revealed doctrine of *Tawhid*. Alternatively, the universalist Muslim can affirm not only that Christians worship the same God as do Muslims. This infinite oneness will then be seen as that which encompasses all things, and as such, is far from a numerical unity; rather, it is simply, that which has no second.

To a direct question such as this, it is good to give an equally direct answer: Yes—unequivocally and unabashedly, Muslims and Christians do indeed believe in the same God. We will substantiate our position with the help of two chief sources: the revealed data of the Qur'an, and the inspired data of the mystics of both Christianity and Islam. The Qur'an—and the Sunna or Conduct of the Prophet, which is an eloquent commentary thereon—provides us with irrefutable evidence that the supreme Object of belief and worship is God for both Muslims and Christians, even if the conceptions of God held by Muslims and Christians diverge and, at points, contradict each other. As we hope to show, the perspectives of such mystics as Ibn al-'Arabī in Islam, and Meister Eckhart in Christianity help to reveal the manner in which these divergent subjective conceptions of God fail to infringe upon the objective one-and-onliness of the God believed in by Muslims and Christians. We can summarise our argument as follows: Muslims and Christians believe in the same God objectively, ontologically, and metaphysically; this is so, despite the fact that subjectively, conceptually and theologically, their conceptions of God be divergent, even contradictory. The God in whom Muslims and Christians believe is one and the same; here, the stress must be placed on the Object of belief, rather than the subject thereof: if 'belief' be defined principally in terms of the divine Object rather than the human subject, then our answer to the question posed will be in the affirmative.

We cannot of course ignore the subjective side of the question, but even here, we can answer affirmatively, if the 'belief' of the human subject be defined more in terms of spiritual orientation than mental conception, focusing more on the inner essence of faith than on its outer form. This attempt to focus on the essential elements of faith within the subject, rather than the relatively accidental features of conceptual belief, reflects our concern with what is most essential in the divine Object of faith—namely, ultimate Reality, rather than derivative, dogmatically expressed aspects of that Reality. The mystics of the two traditions help us to arrive at this position of divine 'objectivity', this perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*, in which the unique metaphysical Object of belief takes priority over the theologically divergent, subjectively variegated, conceptions of that Object. The divine, or absolute, or ontological 'Yes' to the question

posed will then be seen to infinitely outweigh any possible human, relative or conceptual 'No'.

The key theological controversy to be addressed here is, quite evidently, that surrounding the Trinitarian conception of God: does the Christian belief in a Trinitarian God necessarily imply for both Christians and for Muslims that Christians believe in a God quite other than that believed in by Muslims? The Trinity, expressing the belief that God is one and He is three; together with the Incarnation, expressing the belief that God became man, was crucified, and rose from the dead, thereby liberating humanity from sin—these beliefs fly in the face of the central tenets of Muslim faith. The most fundamental aspect of the Muslim creed is centred on an affirmation of divine oneness (*Tawhid*), one of the most important Qur'anic formulations of which explicitly rejects that which lies at the core of Christian belief, the idea that God could have a 'son'. Chapter 112 of the Qur'an, entitled 'Purity' or 'Sincerity' (*Sūrat al-Ikhlās*) reads as follows:

*'Say: He, God, is One,
God, the Eternally Self-Subsistent
He Begetteth not, nor is He begotten
And there is none like unto Him.'*

There is evidently a theological impasse here, a fundamental incompatibility between the respective conceptual forms taken by belief in the same God. What follows is an attempt to show that this incompatibility on the level of theological form does not necessarily imply incompatibility on the level of spiritual essence. Muslims and Christians can, to borrow James Cutsinger's challenging phrase, 'disagree to agree': they can disagree theologically and exoterically, in order to agree metaphysically and esoterically.¹

Qur'anic affirmation of the Christian 'God'

It is part of a Muslim's belief that God, as the source of life and love, wisdom and compassion, has revealed messages concerning Himself to *all* human communities, in different ways, and at different times;² and that these revelations, from 'above', are so many means by which our innate certainty of God from 'within' is aroused, awakened, and perfected. This belief is clearly articulated by numerous verses of the Qur'an. The Muslim is enjoined by the Qur'an to believe in 'God and His Angels, and His Books, and His Prophets' and to affirm: 'we do not distinguish between His Messengers' (2:285). More explicitly, the Muslim is instructed: 'Say: We believe in God, and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which was

given unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have submitted' (2:136). Given the fact that it is the one and only God who has revealed Himself to the Biblical Prophets, to Jesus and to Muhammad, it is this one and only God that, according to the logic of the Qur'an, is objectively 'believed in' by Muslims, Christians and Jews who are faithful to their respective revelations.

'He hath ordained for you of the religion that which He commended unto Noah, and that which We reveal to thee [Muhammad], and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein ...' (42:13).

A single Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition is here being affirmed, one which is inwardly differentiated, each of the Prophets coming to affirm and renew what was revealed by his predecessor. The key characteristic defining the relationship between the different Prophets is *confirmation*:

'And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps [the footsteps of the Jewish Prophets], confirming that which was [revealed] before him in the Torah, and We bestowed upon him the Gospel wherein is guidance and light, confirming that which was [revealed] before it in the Torah—a guidance and an admonition unto those who are pious. Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which God hath revealed therein' (5:46-47).³

The very next verse, 5:48, begins with the following words, reinforcing this crucial role of reciprocal confirmation. 'And unto thee [Muhammad] We have revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and as a guardian over it'.

The logical consequence of these assertions of the unique source of revelation for all three traditions is the Qur'an's categorical affirmation that the God worshipped by the Christians and the Jews ('the People of the Book') is the selfsame God worshipped by Muslims:

'And argue not with the People of the Book except in a manner most fine—but not with those who are oppressors, and say: "We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and that which hath been revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we submit" (29:46).

This verse gives us the most definitive answer to the question we have been asked, and it is reinforced by several other verses, amongst which the following is one of the most important. According to most commentators, this was the first verse revealed granting permission to the Muslims to fight in self-defence against aggressors. It is of particular pertinence to our theme, underlining as it does the duty of Muslims to protect believers in the Christian and Jewish

communities—thus inducing a spirit of solidarity among all those who believe in ‘God’:

‘Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought, for they have been wronged, and surely God is able to give them victory; those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said: Our Lord is God. Had God not driven back some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques—wherein the name of God is oft-invoked—would assuredly have been destroyed’ (22: 39-40).

‘The name of God’—of the one and only, selfsame God—is ‘invoked’ in monasteries, churches and synagogues, and not just in mosques. Just as in Islamic theology, the one God has many ‘names’, without thereby becoming anything other than one, so the different ‘names’ given to God in the different revelations do not make the object named anything but one.⁴ The names of God revealed by God in these revelations are thus to be seen in stark contrast to those ‘names’ manufactured by the polytheists as labels for their idols. These false gods are described as follows: ‘They are but names that ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which God hath revealed no authority’ (53:23).

The various names by which God is named in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, on the contrary, do have ‘authority’. They refer to one and the same Reality in a manner at once authoritative and authentic, precisely on account of having been revealed by that Reality. These names, therefore, resonate not only with that supreme Reality transcending all thought and language, but also with the innate knowledge of God which articulates the inmost reality of the human soul, the *fitra*;⁵ this knowledge is either nurtured and brought to fruition through revelation granted by God, or else neglected and stunted by forgetfulness and sin. The point here is that it is the same God who creates each soul with innate knowledge of Him, the same God who reveals Himself to all souls in diverse ways, and the same God who is worshipped by the communities defined by these revelations. It is for this reason, among others, that the Qur’an holds out the promise of salvation not just to Muslims but to ‘Jews, Christians and Sabeans’, bringing these three specifically mentioned religious communities into the generic category of believers who combine faith with virtue:

‘Truly those who believe [in this Revelation], and the Jews and the Christians and the Sabeans—whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds—their reward is with their Lord, neither fear nor grief shall befall them’ (2:62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69). ‘Their Lord’, *Rabbihim*, in other words, the Lord of the Jews and Christians is the same as the Lord of the Muslims. The People of the Book are not told to first ensure that their conception of God corresponds exactly to the Islamic conception, and then believe in the

Last Day, and to act virtuously; rather, it is taken for granted that that which is referred to as *Allāb* is the God in whom they believe, the one and only God believed in and worshipped by the Muslims, Christians and Jews alike. Similarly, in the very same verse in which the Prophet is told not to follow the ‘whims’ (*ahwā*) of the People of the Book, he is also told not only to affirm belief in their scripture, but also to affirm that *Allāb* is ‘our Lord and your Lord’: ‘... And be thou upright as thou art commanded and follow not their whims. Instead say: I believe in whatever scripture God hath revealed, and I am commanded to be just among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us, our works, and unto you, yours: let there be no argument between us. God will bring us together, and unto Him is the journeying’ (42:15).

If, as we shall see below, there is indeed an ‘argument’ between the Muslims and the Christians, over the Trinity, for example, this argument does not pertain to the question of whether Muslims and Christians believe in the same God, or have the same Lord; rather, the argument is over something more contingent: the human conceptualisation of that Lord, and His attributes and His acts. *That* He is ‘our Lord’ is not disputed—we all believe in Him; *how* ‘our Lord’ is conceived by us is the subject of the dispute.

The verses which we have cited demonstrate that there is an essential and definitive aspect to faith in ‘God’ which takes precedence over the conceptual and dogmatic forms assumed by that faith. This essential faith—in which the sincerity of the human subject of faith is brought into harmonious confrontation with the transcendence of the divine Object of faith—is not annulled by an erroneous conception of That in which one has faith. This positing of two unequal degrees of faith, the one essential and definitive, the other formal and derivative, is not based solely on the Qur’anic verses expressing these two attitudes to the Christian ‘faith’, on the one hand affirmative and on the other negative; it is also derived, as we shall see below, from an act of the Prophet which serves as an implicit commentary, at once dramatic and eloquent, on these two aspects of the Qur’anic discourse.

Qur’anic critique of the Trinity

Before looking at this crucial act of the Prophet, let us consider the Qur’anic critique of the Trinity, and of the idea of divine Sonship, and to note that, although the idea of ‘threeness’ is censured in a general way, the only specific ‘trinity’ mentioned in the Qur’an is not the Trinity affirmed in Christian dogma. On the one hand, both the specific belief in Jesus as the son of God, and the general idea of three-ness is rejected:

‘O People of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter about God aught save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was

but a Messenger of God and His Word which He cast into Mary and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not: “Three”! Desist: it will be better for you. For God is One divinity (*Allāh ilāh wāhid*)—Far removed from His Majesty that He should have a son ...’ (4:171).

On the other hand, the specific configuration of the ‘trinity’ is given in this verse:

‘And behold! God will say: “O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, “Take me and my mother for two gods beside God?”” He will say: “Glory be to Thee! Never could I say that to which I had no right”” (5:116).

One of the most influential commentators in the specifically theological tradition of exegesis, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for example, comments as follows on Q. 4:171:

‘The first issue: the meaning is, “Do not say that God, glorified be He, is one Substance (*janhar*) and three hypostases (*aqānim*)”. Know that the doctrine of the Christians is very obscure. What can be gleaned from it is that they affirm one essence (*dhāt*) that is qualified by three attributes (*ṣifāt*), except that even though they call them attributes, they are in reality essences (*dhawāt*). The proof of this is that they deem it possible for these essences to inhere (*bulūl*) in the person of Jesus and in that of Mary. Were it not so, they would not have deemed it possible for them to inhere in any other [than God], nor separate from that other again. Though they call them “attributes”, they are actually affirming the existence of several ‘self-subsisting essences’ (*dhawāt qā’ima bi-anfusihā*), and this is pure unbelief (*kufīr*) [...] If, however, we were to understand from these “Three” as meaning that they affirm three attributes, then there can be no denying [the truth of] this. How could we [as Muslims] say otherwise, when we [are the ones who] say, “He is God other than whom there is no god, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Knower, the Living, the Omnipotent, the Willer etc., and understand [as we do] each one of these expressions as being distinct from all the others. There can be no other meaning for there being several attributes. Were it unbelief to affirm the existence of several divine attributes, the Qur’an in its entirety would be refuted; and the intellect would also be invalidated since we necessarily know that the concept of God being Knower (*‘alīman*) is other than the concept of Him being Omnipotent (*qādiran*) or Living (*ḥayyan*).⁶

Even if the ‘trinity’ being refuted here is conceived as consisting of the Father, Jesus and Mary,⁷ and even if the Eastern Orthodox view of the Trinity is one in which the ‘monarchy’ of the Father implies that the other two Persons of the Trinity are not in fact ‘self-subsisting’ but subsist through the Father as their sole cause and source,⁸ the crux of the Muslim critique is focused on the Christian idea of the one divine Essence being equally present in and thus ‘shared’ by three Persons or Hypostases; this, in contrast to the

Muslim conception of the one Essence manifesting Itself as so many attributes (*ṣifāt*, sing. *ṣifa*), whose sole ontological substance is the Essence. The latter idea is a concomitant of *Tawḥīd*, being an ‘integration’⁹ of diverse divine attributes within a single ontological substance or essence. Al-Ghazali, for example, gives the classical orthodox Sunni-Ash‘ari position on the divine attributes as follows: the essential attributes of God—living, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, speaking—are ‘superadded’ (*zā‘ida*) to the Essence; these attributes are uncreated and eternal (*qadīma*), but are not self-subsistent, rather they ‘subsist through the Essence’ (*qā‘ima bi’l-dhāt*); they are not identical to the Essence but neither are they other than it.¹⁰ The relationship between the attributes and the Essence is viewed in diverse ways in Islamic theology, but what the overwhelming majority of these formulations have in common is the insistence that the attributes revert to and are predicated of a unique ontological Essence which transcends them all, and by which alone they subsist.¹¹ By contrast, the Christian view of the Trinity is deemed to be *shirk*, ‘association’ or polytheism insofar as it posits three Persons who are deemed to be equally divine. Rāzī says that if the Christians confined themselves to affirming only that God had three attributes, which subsisted not through themselves, but through the Essence of God which radically transcended their Personhood, then they could not be accused of *kufr* or of *shirk*.

The kind of reconciliation of the two theologies apparently being proposed by Rāzī is one in which Christians affirm the transcendence of the unique Essence vis-à-vis the three Persons—or else affirm the transcendence of the ‘Father’ understood as the Essence, who then manifests Himself through two attributes; this is in contrast to a perception of the Essence being ‘shared’ equally by the three Persons who are rendered thereby quasi-indistinguishable from that Essence. It is clear, however, that one of the definitive features of the (orthodox formulation of the) Trinity is precisely this consubstantiality of the three Persons: to affirm a higher Substance or Essence, of which the Persons are so many attributes, aspects or modes, is to fall into what is called the Sabellian heresy of ‘modalism’. Orthodoxy insists that there is no higher Substance than that which is equally shared by the Persons; even if the fount and source of the Godhead be the Father, He shares that Godhead with the other two Persons entirely. And it is this ‘sharing’—among other things—which renders the gap between the theologies of Islam and Christianity unbridgeable. It might be thought the sharing in question cannot be absolute, inasmuch as the Father remains the sole cause of the Godhead, but this would be to give too much emphasis

to the Unity of God and ruin the balance between that Unity and Trinity. St Gregory of Nazianzen makes this clear in his reluctance to use the word 'origin' in relation to the Father:

'I should like to call the Father the greater, because from Him flow both the equality and the being of the equals [i.e., the other two Persons] ... But I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I should make Him the Origin of inferiors, and thus insult Him by precedencies of honour. For the lowering of those who are from Him is no glory to the Source ... Godhead neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same, just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite connaturality of Three Infinite Ones, each God when considered in Himself; as the Father, so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three, one God, when contemplated together; each God because consubstantial; the Three, one God because of the monarchy.'¹²

For the Muslim theologian the principle of unity—'one God because of the monarchy'—is compromised by the assertion of trinity: 'each God because consubstantial'. The logical consequence of this consubstantiality is that all attributes of the Godhead pertain to all three Persons of the Trinity in a quasi-absolute manner: each Person is fully God by dint of sharing the same substance of Godhead, the same nature, while being distinct from the others only on account of a particular 'personal' quality: 'begetting' in the case of the Father, 'being begotten' in the case of the Son, and 'proceeding from' in the case of the Spirit. In the words of St John of Damascus:

'For in their hypostatic or personal properties alone—the properties of being unbegotten, of filiation, and of procession—do the three divine hypostases differ from each, being indivisibly divided, not by essence but by the distinguishing mark of their proper and peculiar hypostasis ... The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one in all respects save those of being unbegotten, of filiation and of procession.'¹³

It is important to highlight the contrast between the two theologies as regards the question of the divine attributes. Everything possessed by the Father—all the divine attributes such as knowledge, power, will, etc.—is equally possessed by the Son and the Spirit, who are distinguished from the Father only by virtue of their particular personal quality of, respectively, being begotten by, and proceeding from, the Father. This view diverges radically from the Islamic conception of the attributes, all of which are possessed by one sole Essence, and each of which are distinguished from all the others by virtue of its particular property or quality; the attribute of knowledge, for example, cannot be equated with that of power, except by virtue of their common root and source in the Essence. According to the Trinity, however, the two attributes are equally predicated of each of the three Persons, who are distinguished from each other, not as one

(Islamically conceived) attribute is distinct from another, but solely by a personal quality defined according to the criterion of origin: ‘the properties of being unbegotten, of filiation, and of procession’, as St John put it, describing, respectively, the Father, Son and Spirit. The three Persons cannot therefore be seen as different attributes of God—nor can the second and third Persons of the Trinity be considered as the two attributes of the first Person; rather, each of the Persons equally possesses all of the attributes of the other two, with the sole exception of the quality determined by their ‘personal’ properties. Apart from this sole distinction, each Person of the Trinity is deemed to be equal to the others insofar as the divine attributes are concerned; so the Son and the Spirit is as omniscient and omnipotent as the Father, and the same applies to all the attributes. It is this ‘sharing’ of divine attributes that is deemed by Muslim theologians to be a violation of *Tawhīd*, constituting the cardinal sin of *shirk*.

If one adds to these considerations the Christian belief that the second Person of the Trinity was incarnated as Jesus Christ, a man who possessed simultaneously a divine nature and a human nature, while retaining an undivided Personhood, so that God Himself ‘became man’—the theological incompatibility between the dogmas of the two faiths will appear all the more absolute. What is a gloriously redeeming paradox for Christianity is pure and utter contradiction for Islam. The salvific paradox of God become man is brought home in all its mystery by the founding father of the way of apophysis, St Dionysius the Areopagite:

‘But especially is It [God as both Unity and Trinity] called loving towards mankind because It truly and completely shared our human nature, recalling and uniting to Itself, in one of Its Persons, the lowness of humanity from which, in an ineffable manner, the simplicity of Jesus became composite, and the Eternal took a temporal existence, and He who super-essentially transcends the whole order of the natural world came down into our nature, yet preserved His own essential Nature wholly unmingled and unchanged.’¹⁴

However, even if the Christian dogmas fall short of the requirements of *Tawhīd*, the point made earlier, based on Qur’anic verses, that the Christians do indeed believe in and worship the selfsame God as the Muslims, is not necessarily invalidated. The question here, for the Muslims, is: which aspect takes priority within the Qur’anic discourse, that of the denial of the Christian conception of the Trinity, or that of the affirmation of the Christian belief in the one God?

Both aspects, of course, have to be accepted by the Muslim, but the challenge is to determine which is to be given priority in the

process of synthesising them into one fundamental attitude to Christian belief. We would argue that the aspect of affirmation must take priority, insofar as the grounds upon which one can affirm that Christians and Muslims believe in the same God, objectively, are more fundamental than the subjective differences of conception of that God. This position will emerge in the measure that we regard the principle of spiritual intention, governed by the divine Object, as taking precedence over the rational conception, fashioned by the human subject. Seen thus, we can assert that what unites Muslims and Christians—belief in one God and not several gods—is infinitely more significant than what divides them: their respective conceptions of the nature, the attributes and the actions of that God. The Qur’anic assertion that the God of the Christians and Muslims is one and the same is an assertion relating more to objective reality and principial idealism than to subjective perception and phenomenal fact: however the Christians subjectively define their God, the object of their definitions and the ultimate goal of their devotion is the one and only God. This kind of reasoning can help Muslims to arrive at the conclusion that the oneness of the God in whom the Christians affirm belief takes priority over the fact that their description of this God entails a Trinity within the Unity. However, in the measure that one’s reasoning follows a theological train of thought, the opposite position will be upheld, that of asserting that the Trinitarian dogma overshadows if not eclipses the oneness of the God thus being described.

Our position might be buttressed by arguments of a different order, symbolic and metaphysical rather than ratiocinative and theological. An appeal has to be made to spiritual intuition, to ‘reasons of the heart’ rather than simply the logic of the mind. There is an incident which took place in the life of the Prophet which calls out to be deciphered by precisely this kind of spiritual intuition which surpasses the level of formal thought. It shows graphically, or ‘proves’ with a dazzling self-evidence, that the God worshipped and believed in by Christians is indeed the same God that is worshipped and believed in by Muslims. It also shows the importance of affirming solidarity with ‘fellow-believers’, and how this spiritual solidarity among believers must ultimately prevail over all theological differences between them.

In the 9th year after the Hijra (631)¹⁵ a Christian delegation from Najran (in Yemen) came to Medina to engage in theological discussion and political negotiation. For our purposes, the most significant aspect of this event is the fact that when the Christians requested to leave the city to perform their liturgy, the Prophet

invited them to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. According to the historian Ibn Ishāq, who gives the standard account of this remarkable event, the Christians in question were ‘Malikī’ that is, Melchite, meaning that they followed the Byzantine Christian rites. Though we do not know exactly what form of liturgy was enacted in the Prophet’s mosque, what is known is that Christians were permitted to perform their prayers in the most sacred place of the Muslims in the Prophet’s city—an act which would be unthinkable were these Christians praying to something other than *Allāh*.

Clearly, in this ‘existential’ commentary on the Qur’anic discourse relating to the Christian faith, it is the supra-theological or metaphysical perspective of identity or unity which takes priority over theological divergence. The reality of this divergence is not denied by the prophetic act; rather, the invalidity of drawing certain conclusions from this divergence is revealed: one cannot use the divergence as grounds for asserting that Christians believe in and worship something other than God. The act of the Prophet shows, on the contrary, that disagreement on the plane of dogma can—and should—coexist with spiritual affirmation on the superior plane of ultimate Reality, that Reality of which dogma is an inescapably limited, conceptual expression. Exoteric or theological distinction remains on its own level, and this distinction is necessary for upholding the uniqueness and integrity of each path: ‘... for each of you [communities] We have established *a* Law and *a* Path (5:48; emphasis added); while esoteric or spiritual identity is implied or intended: the summit is One, and the believer ‘tends towards’ that oneness in sincere devotion, whatever be the form taken by that devotion: ‘so strive with one another in good works. Unto your Lord is your return, all of you, and He will inform you about those things concerning which ye differed’ (5:48, end of the verse).

The Prophet’s action thus reinforces the primary thrust of the Qur’anic message regarding the God of the Christians: it is the same God that is worshipped, but that God is conceived differently—erroneously, as each would say about the other. The oneness of the divine Object takes precedence—infinately, one might add—over any diversity wrought by the human subjects; that which is spiritually intended by sincere faith takes priority over the verbal and conceptual forms assumed by the intention, the spiritual tendency, the movement of the heart and soul towards God. What is shared in common is the fundamental aspiration to worship the one and only God—the objective, transcendent, unique, and ineffable Reality; that which is not shared in common is the manner in which that Reality is conceived, and the mode by which that Reality is worshipped: we

have here a fusion at the level of the Essence, without any confusion at the level of forms. The dogmas and rituals of each faith are thus distinct and irreducible, while the summit of the path delineated by dogma and ritual is one and the same.

The metaphysical principle expressed by the Prophet's act is seen also embedded in an eschatological event described by the Prophet. The following saying—which exists in slightly different variants, in the most canonical of *hadith* collections—concerns the possibility of seeing God in the Hereafter. The Muslims are confronted by a theophany of their Lord, whom they do not recognize: 'I am your Lord', He says to them. 'We seek refuge in God from you,' they reply, 'we do not associate anything with our Lord'. Then God asks them: 'Is there any sign (*āya*) between you and Him by means of which you might recognize Him?' They reply in the affirmative, and then 'all is revealed', and they all try to prostrate to Him. Finally, as regards this part of the scene, 'He transforms Himself into the form in which they saw Him the first time,¹⁶ and He says: "I am your Lord", and they reply: "You are our Lord!"¹⁷

Ibn al-'Arabī and the 'god created in belief'

The consequences of this remarkable saying are far-reaching. God can appear in forms quite unrecognisable in terms of the beliefs held by Muslims; and if this be true on the Day of Judgment it is equally so in this world. In the Sufi tradition, it is Ibn al-'Arabī who provides the most satisfying commentary on the cognitive implications of this principle, and who also furnishes us with our strongest grounds, from within the mystical tradition of Islam, for answering in the affirmative the question posed to us in this consultation. The essence of his commentary is that one and the same Reality can take a multitude of forms, hence It must not be confined within the forms of one's own belief. The divinity conceived by the mind is not, and cannot be, the pure Absolute, but is rather, the 'god created in beliefs' (*al-ilāh al-makhlūq fi'l-i'tiqādāt*). This 'created' god, however, far from being a source of misguidance for the creatures, is itself the consequence of the merciful radiation of the God who loves to be known: 'After the Mercy Itself, "the god created in belief" is the first recipient of Mercy.'¹⁸ God is said to have 'written mercy' upon His own soul, according to the Qur'an (6:12, and . Being Himself the essence of Mercy, the first 'form' receiving that mercy is the quality of mercy itself, the fount of radiant creativity. Thereafter, the 'god created in belief' receives merciful existention, and this refers not just to the diverse modes of theophanic revelation to humankind, but also to the capacity of each human soul to conceive of God, thus, in a sense, the power to 'create' God in one's belief. 'Since God

is the root of every diversity in beliefs ... everyone will end up with mercy. For it is He who created them [the diverse beliefs] ...'¹⁹

According to this perspective, the various revelations, along with diverse beliefs fashioned thereby, constitute so many ways by which God invites His creatures to participate in His infinitely merciful nature. Recognition of such realities means that it is 'improper' to deny God such as He is conceived in the beliefs of others:

'Generally speaking, each man necessarily sticks to a particular creed concerning his Lord. He always goes back to his Lord through his particular creed and seeks God therein. Such a man positively recognizes God only when He manifests Himself to him in the form recognized by his creed. But when He manifests Himself in other forms he denies Him and seeks refuge from Him. In so doing he behaves in an improper way towards Him in fact, even while believing that he is acting politely towards Him. Thus a believer who sticks to his particular creed believes only in a god that he has subjectively posited in his own mind. God in all particular creeds is dependent upon the subjective act of positing on the part of the believers.'²⁰

In other words, God mercifully and lovingly reveals Himself to His creation in theophanies which cannot but conform themselves to the subjective dimension of the creature; but there is a dynamic interaction between the human subject and the divine Object, between the accidental container and the substantial content: the human is drawn into the divine, to the extent that the conceptually circumscribed belief gives way to the spiritual realization of the content of the belief. Or else the divine is swallowed up by the human, who is blinded by the form of his belief from its essential content.

As mentioned above, the different beliefs are a priori determined by the 'heart', but the capacity of the heart itself is in turn is fashioned by an initial cosmogonic effusion of grace from the merciful Lord. So human subjectivity is itself the result of divine creativity, and cannot therefore intrinsically relativise the Absolute, even while appearing to do so. God not only creates man, but in a sense allows man to create Him, which he does by conceiving of Him and believing in Him and worshipping Him according to the form of his own belief. God, however, is truly present and active within that belief—or at least one dimension of divinity is. For Ibn al-'Arabī distinguishes between the absolute Essence of God—sometimes referred to as *al-Abad*, the all-exclusive One—and the Lord (al-Rabb), also called the 'divinity' (*al-ulūhiyya*) or simply the 'level' (*al-martaba*). The distinction between these two dimensions within the divine nature is fundamental to the metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī. One can only know and relate to the names and qualities of the

Lord, or the ‘divinity’ or the ‘level; but of the Essence one remains forever ignorant:

‘He who supposes that he has knowledge of positive attributes of the Self has supposed wrongly. For such an attribute would define Him, but His Essence has no definition.’²²¹

The Essence has nothing to do with creation; the only relationship between the divine Reality and creation is perforce mediated by an intermediary principle, which is the ‘divinity’ or the ‘level’: at once divine and relative. It is this degree of relativity within divinity which can be conceived, and thus believed in and worshipped. This is the first degree of theophanic Self-determination proper to the Essence which remains, nonetheless, forever transcendent in relation to all that flows forth from this Self-determination, and *a fortiori*, all that takes place within creation.

‘It is not correct for the Real and creation to come together in any mode whatsoever in respect of the Essence, only in respect of the fact that the Essence is described by divinity.’²²²

The Essence becoming ‘described’ by divinity means that It is *transcribed* within relativity by this theophany, without in any way sacrificing its immutable transcendence. It is this divinity or Lord that, alone can be conceived and worshipped. Ibn al-‘Arabī expresses this principle in various ways, amongst which the most striking is the following exegesis of 18:119: ‘Let him not associate (any) one with his Lord’s worship’. The literal meaning of the verse relates to the prohibition of *shirk* or associating false gods with the true divinity, but Ibn Arabi makes the ‘one’ in question refer to the Essence, and interprets the verse thus:

‘He is not worshipped in respect of His Unity, since Unity contradicts the existence of the worshipper. It is as if He is saying, “What is worshipped is only the ‘Lord’ in respect of His Lordship, since the Lord brought you into existence. So connect yourself to Him and make yourself lowly before Him, and do not associate Unity with Lordship in worship ... For Unity does not know you and will not accept you ...”’²²³

The degree of divinity that can be conceived of, believed in, and worshipped cannot be the pure untrammelled unity of the Essence. As we shall see with both St Dionysius and Eckhart, this apophatic approach to the supreme Reality opens up a path which transcends all divergences as regards theological descriptions of God. To continue with this brief exposition of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s perspective, let us note that despite the transcendence of the One above all beliefs concerning it, God is nonetheless ‘with every object of belief.’ This statement evokes the divine utterance: ‘I am with the opinion My slave has of Me.’²²⁴ The word ‘with’ translates *‘inda*, which might also be translated as ‘present within/as/to’²²⁵: God thus declares that, in a

sense, He conforms to whatever form of belief His slave has of him. Ibn al-‘Arabī continues: ‘His [i.e. God’s] existence in the conception (*tasawwur*) of him who conceives Him does not disappear when that person’s conception changes into another conception. No, He has an existence in this second conception. In the same way, on the Day of Resurrection, he will transmute Himself in self-disclosure from form to form...’²⁶

Ibn al-‘Arabī is here referring back to the principle of the divine capacity to undergo *tabawwul*, according to the prophetic saying cited above. What is true of God on the Day of Resurrection is true here and now. Whether it be a case of different individuals, different schools of thought within Islam, or between different religions: God is truly present within all these diverse conceptions and beliefs concerning Him, without this resulting in any fundamental contradiction, given the infinitude of the theophanic forms by which God can reveal Himself, and given the indefinite possibilities of conception spread throughout the human race. What we are given here is a picture of radical relativism, but one which, paradoxically, ‘proves’ the one and only Absolute. For the Absolute is that which transcends all possible powers of conception, and yet immanently and mercifully pervades all conceptions of Him. One of the most useful images employed by Ibn al-‘Arabī to reconcile the two terms of this paradox is that of the water and the cup: water takes on the colour of the cup. The cup symbolises the form of belief, while the water contained therein stands for the Object of belief.

‘He who sees the water only in the cup judges it by the property of the cup. But he who sees it simple and noncompound knows that the shapes and colors in which it becomes manifest are the effect of the containers. Water remains in its own definition and reality, whether in the cup or outside it. Hence it never loses the name “water”.’²⁷

In this image, the cup symbolizes the form of the ‘preparedness’ or ‘receptivity’ (*isti‘dād*) of a particular belief; the water in the cup symbolises the theophany which has adapted itself to the form and shape of the belief. The substance and colour of water as such is undifferentiated and unique, but it appears to undergo changes of form and colour on account of the accidental forms of the receptacles in which it is poured. Ibn al-‘Arabī is alluding to the need to recognize that water as such cannot be perceived except through the cup of one’s own belief: this recognition enables one to realize that the ‘water’—or theophanies/beliefs—in receptacles other than one’s own is just as much ‘water’ as is the water in one’s own cup. One can thus affirm the veracity of all beliefs or rather: all those beliefs whose ‘cups’ are fashioned by authentic Revelation, even if

they be also forged by the unavoidable relativity of the creaturely faculty of conception. We are being urged by Ibn al-‘Arabī to judge all such receptacles according to their content, rather than be misled into judging the content according to the accidental properties of the container. What is ‘accidental’ here includes even the dogmas of the different faiths, none of which can claim to exhaust the mystery of that Substance to which they allude.

To affirm only the ‘God’ created within one’s belief is thus tantamount to denying Him in all other beliefs: ‘He who delimits Him denies Him in other than his own delimitation. . . . But he who frees Him from every delimitation never denies Him. On the contrary, he acknowledges Him in every form within which He undergoes self-transmutation.’²⁸

The consequences of this denial will be a diminution in one’s receptivity to the loving mercy contained within the beliefs of others. However, attaching oneself only to the ‘water’ within one’s own cup still results in mercy, given that the theophanic form is still a true theophany, it is God and nothing but God, even if the form assumed by God be extrinsically limited by the form of one’s belief: there is an absoluteness of content, combined with a relativity of the container, but that absoluteness is not relativised by the container. Rather, what is excluded by the container is the infinite forms of theophany filling the containers of other beliefs. In other words, it is not the absoluteness of God that is relativised by the specificity of one’s belief, but the opposite: the relativity of the human belief is rendered absolute by virtue of the absoluteness of its content, and in the measure that this content be assimilated in depth. For then one perceives—or drinks—water as such, the substance of which is identical to that contained in all other containers. So the very absoluteness of the content of one’s realized belief leads to an assimilation of the infinitude proper to that absoluteness. ‘Tasting’ the water within one’s own cup means tasting water as such, and thus, in principle, the water in all the other cups has likewise been drunk.

Even if this total realization is not attained, the believer will nonetheless benefit from his capacity to recognize God in beliefs other than his own, for he has a glimpse of the felicity which flows from the unrestricted beatific vision of God in all His forms. The beatific vision experienced by the believer in the Hereafter will conform to the nature of his conception and attitude towards God in the here-below. This is clearly asserted by Ibn al-‘Arabī in the course of describing the ‘share’ accorded to the highest saint: he enjoys the felicity which is the fruit of all forms of belief held by the faithful of

the different religions, because he recognizes their correspondence to real aspects of the divine nature.²⁹ This direct and plenary participation in the felicity that is contained within the forms of beliefs concerning God is thus seen to be a reality already in this life, as a prefiguration of the higher celestial states.

Thus, Ibn al-‘Arabī urges the believer to make himself receptive to all forms of religious belief both for the sake of objective veracity—that is, ‘the true knowledge of the reality’ that God is immanent within all forms of His Self-revelation—and in the interests of one’s posthumous state—the ‘great benefit’ that accrues to the soul in the Hereafter in proportion to the universality of the knowledge of God which it has attained on earth. The vision that results from this openness to the diversity of theophanies within the forms of different beliefs is beautifully expressed in the most famous lines from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s poetic masterpiece, *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*:

‘My heart has become capable of every form:

it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka‘ba,

and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take,

that is my religion and my faith.³⁰

Finally, let us look at the remarkable interpretation given by Ibn al-‘Arabī to one his own lines of poetry in this work. This gives us one possible way of understanding the meaning of the Christian Trinity from within the Islamic faith. The line in the poem is as follows:

‘My Beloved is three although He is One, even as the Persons are made

one Person in essence.’ The interpretation given by the poet himself:

‘Number does not beget multiplicity in the Divine Substance, as the Christians declare that the Three Persons of the Trinity are One God, and as the Qur’an declares: “Call upon God or call on the Merciful; however ye invoke Him, it is well, for to Him belong the most beautiful Names” (17:110).³¹

The most beautiful Names of God, *al-asmā’ al-husnā*, can be seen as the archetypes of all possible modes of theophany, and thereby, of the diverse—even contradictory—beliefs of God proportioned by those theophanic modes of self-revelation. The names are diverse, referring to the different aspects of the Named; beliefs fashioned by the revelation of those names are thus likewise inescapably diverse, but all the beliefs are nonetheless at one in the supreme Object of faith.

One is urged by the metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī, then, to ‘see through’ the cup of one’s own belief, and to be receptive to the ‘water’ it contains, the objective content of belief. This receptivity is

predicated on a clear conception of the inescapably limited nature of all conceptions: the intrinsically inconceivable nature of ultimate Reality can however be realized in spiritual vision, that vision which arises in proportion to the effacement of the individual (*fanā*). This shift from conceptual limitation to spiritual vision is well expressed by Ibn al-‘Arabī in relation to Moses’s quest to see God. Ibn al-‘Arabī records the following dialogue he had with Moses in the course of his spiritual ascent through the heavens:

‘[I said to him] . . . you requested the vision [of God], while the Messenger of God [Muhammad] said that “not one of you will see his Lord until he dies?”’ So he said: “And it was just like that: when I asked Him for the vision, He answered me, so that ‘I fell down stunned’ (Q 7, 143). Then I saw Him in my [state of] being stunned.” I said: “While (you were) dead?” He replied: “While (I was) dead. . . . I did not see God until I had died”’.³²

This is the consummation of the apophatic path: ‘extinction within contemplation’, (*al-fanā’ fī mushābada*) this being precisely the title of one of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most explicit treatises on the theme of *fanā*. As we shall see in a moment, the similarities between this perspective and those of both St Dionysius and Meister Eckhart are striking.

Christian apophaticism and superessential identity

The perspective of Ibn al-‘Arabī, we would argue, is mirrored in the apophatic tradition of mystical theology within Christianity. It is in this tradition that all dogmatic formulations of the ultimate Reality are seen as falling short of adequately explaining or describing It. As with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ‘god created in beliefs’, mystics of this tradition insist on the need to transcend all conceptual expressions, and the very source of those concepts, the mind itself, in order to glimpse and finally to realize the Ineffable. We would argue that it is through understanding this process of radical deconstruction at the conceptual level, grasped as the prelude to an ‘unthinkable’ spiritual ‘reconstruction’ at the transcendent level, that the oneness of the God believed in by Christians and Muslims stands out most clearly. For if the mind and all that it can conceive is transcended by the spiritual realization of That which is inconceivable, then *a fortiori* all designations of the Ineffable are likewise transcended, even those designations which form the core of the Trinitarian dogma.

We cannot enter into the breadth and depth of the apophatic tradition here; suffice to draw attention to the principal features of this tradition which are pertinent to our argument, and to cite two of its greatest representatives, the ‘founding father’ of this tradition, St Dionysius the Areopagite, and Meister Eckhart. First let us note the

importance of the following point made by Lossky about this tradition of 'thought' in general: it is one in which thought itself is subordinated to 'being', to an existential transformation of the soul:

'Apophaticism is not necessarily a theology of ecstasy. It is, above all, an attitude of mind which refuses to form concepts about God. Such an attitude utterly excludes all abstract and purely intellectual theology which would adapt the mysteries of the wisdom of God to human ways of thoughts. It is an existential attitude which involves the whole man: there is no theology apart from experience; it is necessary to change, to become a new man. To know God one must draw near to Him. No one who does not follow the path of union with God can be a theologian. The way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification. ... Apophaticism is, therefore, a criterion: the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to truth. In this sense all true theology is fundamentally apophatic.'³³

Further on in this seminal text, Lossky refers to the ultimate function of the dogma of the Trinity: 'The dogma of the Trinity is a cross for human ways of thought.'³⁴ This means, for us at any rate, that the dogma of the Trinity is not intended to function as an 'explanation' of God, rather, it is a means of thinking the unthinkable in order to efface all thought within the mystery that is intrinsically incommunicable. This principle is brought home clearly by St Dionysius in his prayer to the Deity 'above all essence, knowledge and goodness' at the very beginning of his treatise *The Mystical Theology*: '... direct our path to the ultimate summit of Thy mystical Lore, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness...'³⁵

The purpose of defining the ultimate reality in terms of darkness, and as that which is even 'beyond being', is not simply to shroud that reality in utter, impenetrable obscurity, but rather to precipitate receptivity to that reality by showing the inability of the human mind in and of itself to attain comprehension of, or union with, that reality. It is the contrast between ultimate reality—as utter Darkness—and mental abstraction—apparent light—that is in question. He continues, addressing his disciple:

'... do thou, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and non-being, that thou mayest arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things, thou mayest be borne on high,

through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.’

He then refers to the ‘transcendental First Cause’, and criticizes those who deny that ‘He is in any way above the images which they fashion after various designs’. This resonates deeply with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s image of the cup and the water. The similarity between the two perspectives is deepened when we read that this transcendent Reality ‘reveals Himself in His naked Truth to those alone who pass beyond all that is pure and impure, and ascend above the summit of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells, as the Scriptures declare, that One Who is beyond all.’³⁶

This One is evidently beyond any conceivable notion of threeness—but it is also, as we shall see, equally beyond any conceivable notion of oneness. First, let us note that Moses’s quest for the vision of God is also used by Dionysius to bring home the point that God cannot be seen, but He can be realized. God cannot be seen because ‘the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expressions of those that are immediately beneath Him Who is above all.’ It is only through being plunged into the Darkness, and through ‘the inactivity of all his reasoning powers’ that the soul can be ‘united by his highest faculty to Him who is wholly unknowable; thus by knowing nothing, he knows That which is beyond his knowledge.’³⁷

We are reminded here of what Ibn al-‘Arabī said in relation to the Lord/divinity/level: it is that aspect of Reality which, in contrast to the Essence, can be conceived; it is that degree of being, beneath the Essence, to which belief and worship are proportioned. Likewise for St Dionysius, vision, conception and contemplation pertain only to the penultimate ontological degree, not to ultimate Reality: ‘the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the *symbolical* expressions of those that are *immediately beneath* Him Who is above all.’ All doctrines and dogmas, even those reaching up to the ‘divinest and highest’ cannot be regarded even as symbols of ultimate Reality itself, they can only symbolize what is ‘immediately beneath Him.’ The function of the symbols, then, is to induce receptivity to That which cannot even be adequately symbolized let alone explained or described by concepts.

If all all visible and intelligible forms are alike ‘symbolical expressions’ of the penultimate Reality, they must therefore be ‘seen through’, just as one must see through the ‘cup’ of one’s belief to the water it ‘contains’. This capacity to appreciate the symbolic nature of one’s beliefs, and of one’s entire conceptual apparatus, is the prerequisite for taking the plunge into that Oneness which is

inconceivable, being beyond even the notion of oneness. At this transcendent level, then, the pure Absolute 'believed in' by Christians and Muslims is revealed to be one and the same. This is expressed most explicitly, however, not through affirmation, but through radical denial. The Transcendent One is described as not being 'one or oneness ... nor sonship nor fatherhood'.³⁸

Both the Christian dogma of the Trinity and the Muslim doctrine of *Tawhid* are here being challenged—as *concepts*. The ultimate Reality cannot be described in terms of number, nor *a fortiori*, in terms of any dualistic relationship such as is implied by 'fatherhood' and 'sonship'. Both the idea of oneness and that of trinity are alike to be grasped as symbolic of the threshold of Reality, and are not taken literally as definitions of that threshold, or, still less, the Essence of that Reality.

Eckhartian Trinity and Muslim Unity

Let us now turn to Eckhart, and look in particular at the daring manner in which the Trinity is relativised in the face of the realization of the Absolute. His exposition of the Trinity has the merit of rendering explicit some of the key premises which may be implicit in the assertion by Christians that the Muslims do believe in the same God as themselves, even if they deny the Trinity: they believe in the Essence of that Divinity which assumes, at a lower ontological degree, the aspect of three-ness. It also has the considerable merit of showing Muslims that there is a presentation of the Trinity which not only harmonises with *Tawhid*, but indeed brings to light dimensions of *Tawhid* in a manner comparable to the greatest of the mystical sages of Islam who have asserted that the idea of 'monotheism' can be a veil over the One, just as much as polytheism is. That is, it helps the Muslim to transform a dogmatic and formal conception of oneness into an existential, spiritual and transformative awareness of that which is beyond being and thus infinitely beyond the realm of number.

This, indeed, is the ontological shift of consciousness which the Sufis insist on: God is one, not just in the sense of being 'not two', but in the sense of excluding all otherness. The theological affirmation of one God is transformed into a spiritual realization that there is but a unique reality, inwardly differentiated by virtue of its own imprescriptible infinitude. To think otherwise, for the Sufis, is to fall into a 'hidden' polytheism or *shirk*. This *shirk khafī* was described by the Prophet as being 'more hidden than a black ant crawling on a dark stone in a moonless night'.³⁹

Before addressing directly the Trinity, it is worth noting that Eckhart's approach to thought generally coincides precisely with that of Dionysius and Ibn al-'Arabī. All mentally articulated attributes fall

short of ‘describing’ the divine reality: ‘It is its nature to be without nature. To think of goodness or wisdom or power dissembles the essence and dims it in thought. The mere thought obscures essence ... For goodness and wisdom and whatever may be attributed to God are all admixtures to God’s naked essence: for all admixture causes alienation from essence.’⁴⁰

Its nature is ‘without nature’, that is, it is devoid of any specific nature, or attributes that can be adequately expressed in human language; one cannot relativise the divine reality by equating it with any attributes. It does possess these attributes, intrinsically, but It also transcends them, and this is the key point: it is this transcendence of every conceivable attribute that makes it the Absolute.

Eckhart’s insistence that our conception of God be shorn of any ‘nature’ or attribute is echoed in the following words of ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, fourth caliph of Islam, and first Imam of the Shi’a Muslims.⁴¹ This is how he comments on the meaning of *ikhlās*, literally ‘making pure’, in theological parlance, sincere or pure worship:

‘The perfection of purification (*ikhlās*) is to divest Him of all attributes—because of the testimony of every attribute that it is other than the object of attribution, and because of the testimony of every such object that it is other than the attribute. So whoever ascribes an attribute to God—glorified be He!—has conjoined Him [with something else] and whoever so conjoins Him has made Him two-fold, and whoever makes Him two-fold has fragmented Him, and whoever thus fragments Him is ignorant of Him.’⁴²

God of course is endowed with attributes—the 99 ‘names of God’ being the names of these attributes, precisely. Imam ‘Alī clearly is not denying the reality of these attributes as such, for earlier in the sermon cited above, he affirms that God’s attributes have ‘no defined limit’. This is because the attributes are identical in their essence to the Essence as such, and have no self-subsisting reality apart from that Essence. One can identify the attributes with the Essence, but not vice versa: it is an act of *shirk*, to identify the Essence either with Its own attributes or, still worse, with our understanding of these attributes. Thus, Eckhart’s conception of the Absolute, above and beyond all mental conceptions, specific nature, and even beyond the Trinity can easily be read by a Muslim as rooted in the avoidance of subtle *shirk*, and as a commentary on the meaning of the first testimony of Islam, *no god but God*.

This is particularly clear when we look at the way in which Eckhart deals with the question of God’s ‘being’. For he stresses in many places that God is ‘beyond Being’, and thus transcends all

possibility of being described by the attributes proper to Being. God, he says, is as high above being as the highest angel is above the lowest ant?⁴³ ‘When I have said God is not a being and is above being, I have not thereby denied Him being; rather I have exalted it in Him. If I get copper in gold, it is there ... in a nobler mode than it is in itself.’⁴⁴ The denial, then, of the specific, conceivable attributes of God—including even that most indeterminate and universal attribute, Being itself—means an exaltation of all of these attributes in their undifferentiated essence. This is precisely what Imam ‘Alī is alluding to when he negates the divine attributes on the one hand, and sublimates them on the other. The attributes are more fully and really themselves in the divine oneness than they are in their own specificity, and *a fortiori* in the mental conceptions we have of them. So the denial of the attributes is a denial on the purely mental plane, it is not a denial of their intrinsic substance. This substance is one, but it is outwardly articulated in conformity with the differentiated planes upon which its inner infinitude unfolds. There is no plurality in the divine nature, which remains absolutely simple; but there are distinctions as regards the manner in which this unique reality relates to the world. This leads to the following important point pertaining to the non-numerical nature of the Trinity:

‘For anyone who could grasp distinctions without number and quantity, a hundred would be as one. Even if there were a hundred Persons in the Godhead, a man who could distinguish without number and quantity would perceive them only as one God ... (he) knows that three Persons are one God.’⁴⁵

The point here is that for Eckhart the essence of God—the Godhead or the Ground—transcends all conceivable distinctions. All that can be said of it, provisionally, is that it is absolutely one. Mental conception—and thus all dogma—is incapable of expressing the reality of God, and yet one has to make an effort to conceive of the divine essence as pure and untrammelled unity. However, even the conception of oneness is tainted by its very form as a conception: ‘the mere thought dims the essence’. One is thus left with the task of conceiving of the One while at the same time knowing that this conception is inescapably flawed: one has to perceive oneness by seeing through the veil of that very perception. As mentioned earlier: one has to conceive of ‘That which is inconceivable; for it is possible to conceive *that* it is, but impossible to conceive *what* it is. It is a ‘something’ as he says in the passage below, ‘which is neither this nor that’.

‘[S]o truly one and simple is this citadel, so mode and power transcending is this solitary One, that neither power nor mode can gaze into it, nor even God Himself! ... God never looks in there for one

instant, in so far as He exists in modes and in the properties of His Persons ... this One alone lacks all mode and property ... for God to see inside it would cost Him all His divine names and personal properties: all these He must leave outside ... But only in so far as He is one and indivisible (can He do this): in this sense He is neither Father, Son nor Holy Ghost and yet is a something which is neither this nor that.⁴⁶

This metaphysical perspective, clearly indicating the relativity of the ontological plane upon which the Trinity is conceivable, will help the Muslim to see that an understanding of the absolute oneness of the One is not necessarily compromised by the dogma of the Trinity; the Muslim might come to see that the Trinity is an outer deployment of the One, and is thus analogous to the divine Names which are nothing other than just such a deployment. The Persons, like the divine attributes in Islam, are identical to the Essence, which is absolute simplicity. While the Persons are distinguished from each other in terms of origin, otherwise being equal in all respects, the attributes are distinguished from each other in terms of the specific relationships they embody, relationships between the Essence and creation. In both cases, there is an outward differentiation which does not infringe upon an inward identity.

One of the clearest expressions of the universal spiritual principles embodied in the Persons of the Trinity is given by Eckhart when he speaks of the soul being borne up in the Persons, according to the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son and the goodness of the Holy Ghost—these three being the modes of ‘work’ proper to the Persons.⁴⁷ He goes on to say that it is only above all this ‘work’ that ‘the pure absoluteness of free being’ is to be found; the Persons, as such, are ‘suspended in being’. Here, we have a double lesson: not only is the Trinity relativised in the face of the Absolute, it is also universalised—and thus rendered conceivable as intrinsic divine properties. It is made subordinate to pure or absolute being, on the one hand, and it is grasped as the deployment of divine power, wisdom and goodness which, alone, carry the soul towards its goal and its source, to that ‘place where the soul grasps the Persons in the very indwelling of being from which they never emerged’. Here, we are taken far from all anthropomorphic reductionism: the Persons are not like human beings simply writ large, macrocosmic projections of human personalities; rather, their personhood is the extrinsic, symbolic expression of an intrinsic mystery, one which can be plumbed mystically, but not fully graspable mentally.

Eckhart reveals to Christians and Muslims alike the chasm that separates the ordinary conception of the divine attributes from their intrinsic reality, and he shows clearly the poverty of mental conceptions of divine unity in the face of the infinite richness of the

One. For even the affirmation of God's oneness smacks of *shirk* in the measure that it is a 'countable' or numerical one, one unit among other units. The affirmation of divine oneness requires a degree of spiritual intuition of the meaning of that oneness: and this spiritual intuition is founded on the negation of the apparent reality of the creature, as we have seen above in relation both to St Dionysius and Ibn al-'Arabī.

Imam 'Alī expresses this principle in the following saying. He is asked about the meaning of God's oneness, and refers first to the error of the person 'who says "one" and has in mind the category of numbers. Now this is not permissible, for that which has no second does not enter into the category of numbers.'⁴⁸

This statement resonates deeply with the following words of Eckhart:

'One is the negation of the negation and a denial of the denial. All creatures have a negation in themselves: one negates by not being the other ... but God negates the negation: He is one and negates all else, for outside of God nothing is. All creatures are in God, and are His very Godhead, which means plenitude ... God alone has oneness. Whatever is number depends on one, and one depends on nothing. God's riches and wisdom and truth are all absolutely one in God: it is not one, it is oneness.'⁴⁹

Referring to the non-numerical oneness of God as being 'that which has no second' is Imam 'Alī's way of referring to the unique reality of God, apart from whom 'nothing is', as Eckhart's formulation has it. Similarly, Imam 'Alī's negation of the attributes, and his identification of them all with the simplicity of the divine Essence, is expressed by Eckhart's insistence that God's 'riches and wisdom and truth are all absolutely one in God'; and his correction of himself 'it is not one, it is oneness' can be read as a deliberate encouragement to his listeners to shift their consciousness from a static numerical conception of unity standing opposed to an equally static conception of multiplicity, to a dynamic spiritual conception of the eternal integration of multiplicity within unity and the overflowing of the inner riches of that unity within multiplicity.

God alone is absolute Reality, for both of these mystical authorities, and this sole reality is at once all-exclusive, by virtue of its ineffable transcendence, and all-inclusive, by virtue of its inescapable immanence. The 'negation of negation' is tantamount to pure affirmation, but affirmation not of a countable oneness, rather, of an all-inclusive oneness, within which all conceivable multiplicity is eternally comprised. Imam 'Alī's way of expressing Eckhart's 'negation of negation' is as follows. 'Being, but not by way of any becoming; existing, but not from having been non-existent; with

every thing, but not through association; and other than every thing, but not through separation; acting, but not through movements and instruments; seeing, even when nothing of His creation was to be seen; solitary, even when there was none whose intimacy might be sought or whose absence might be missed.⁵⁰

God is ‘with every thing, but not through association’: He is not some separate entity conjoined to the creature, for this would entail a duality—God and the things He is ‘with’; and ‘other than every thing, but not through separation’: His inaccessible transcendence does not imply that He is separate from what He transcends, for this would again entail a duality—God and the things He transcends. Multiplicity is thus integrated within an ontological unity according to Imam ‘Alī’s perspective, and this, we believe, is what Eckhart means when he says that ‘outside God nothing is’: the apparent multiplicity of existence is integrated within the true unity of the One—beyond-Being—in a manner which reflects the way in which the apparent multiplicity of the Trinity is rendered transparent to the unity of its own Essence. To repeat: ‘For anyone who could grasp distinctions without number and quantity, a hundred would be as one. Even if there were a hundred Persons in the Godhead, a man who could distinguish without number and quantity would perceive them only as one God ... (he) knows that three Persons are one God.’

Contemporary Witness

It may well be asked at this point: do we really need all these complex metaphysical arguments in order to affirm that Muslims and Christians believe in the same God? Is it not enough to state that the God in whom Christians believe *unconditionally* is the Father, and it is this God in whom Jews and Muslims alike believe in? If the God referred to throughout the Old Testament is the same God referred to in the Qur’an—the God of Abraham; and if this ‘God’ is the first Person of a Trinity whose outward manifestation in time had to wait until the incarnation of the Word as Jesus—then it follows that the Father is the unconditional, absolute and eternal ‘God’ in whom Muslims—and Jews—believe, even if they do not believe in the other two Persons of the Trinity. Seen thus, the ‘equal’ divinity of the Son and the Spirit is grasped as a derivative equality, an equality bestowed on them by the Father, thus an equal divinity which is conditional. Belief in the Trinity might then still be seen by Christians as the most perfect form of belief in ‘God’, but not the *only* form which belief in God can assume. This argument is in large part based on the following reflections of Jame Cutsinger, given in the seminal paper referred to earlier, ‘Disagreeing to Agree’:

‘As we Orthodox see it, prayerful fidelity to the witness of Scripture, the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, and the language of liturgical worship requires that the word “God” be reserved, strictly speaking, not for some generic form of “self-sufficient life” but for God the Father alone, the first Person of the Holy Trinity, who is said to be the Fount (*pēgē*) of all divinity and the uncaused Cause (*aitia*) of the other two Persons, the Son and the Spirit. In defense of this perspective, we cite such Biblical texts as John 17:3, where Jesus prays to His Father, saying, *This is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*, or again His response to the rich man, *Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone* (Luke 18:19). The opening salutations and concluding blessings of several Pauline epistles further support the Orthodox Trinitarian vision, as for example the doxology in the final verse of the Letter to the Romans: *To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ* (Rom. 16:27). What one passes *through* is evidently not the same as what one passes *to*, and it follows that Jesus is not to be equated or identified with “the only wise God”.’

These points might be seen to be implied in the many contemporary Christian witnesses—witnesses of the highest degree of authority—to the principle that Muslims and Christians do believe in the same God. We conclude this essay with a brief glance at these testimonies. First, let us take note of the unconditional statement of identity made by Pope John Paul II when he addressed a group of Moroccan Muslims: ‘We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.’⁵¹ Likewise: ‘As I have often said in other meetings with Muslims, your God and ours is one and the same, and we are brothers and sisters in the faith of Abraham.’⁵² These statements can be read as re-affirmations of the official Roman Catholic view of Islam, as enunciated in the text of the second Vatican Council, ‘*Nostra Aetate*’:

‘The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their desserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.’⁵³

This unequivocal assertion that Muslims and Christians believe in the same God is not only to be found in the post-Vatican Council era. It is also prefigured in such statements as the following. Pope Pius XI (d.1939) said, when dispatching his Apostolic Delegate to Libya in 1934: ‘Do not think you are going among infidels. Muslims attain to salvation. The ways of Providence are infinite.’⁵⁴ Similarly, some two decades later, Pope Pius XII (d.1959) declared: ‘How consoling it is for me to know that, all over the world, millions of people, five times a day, bow down before God.’⁵⁵

Clearly, for these traditional-minded Popes, as well as for their modern successors, the fact that Muslims do not ‘acknowledge Jesus as God’, or believe in the ‘Trinity’, does not imply that Muslims and Christians believe in a different God. What is implied, rather, is belief in the Father alone, and that this belief suffices to qualify the holder thereof as a true believer, and not as a heretic or a pagan. The transcendent Essence of God—or simply, the Father—is believed in by Muslims and Christians, despite differences as regards their theological definitions, and as regards their different perceptions of the qualities and acts that are to be attributed to God.

Affirmation of belief in the ‘same God’, despite theological differences, can also be observed in the responses given by thousands of Christians scholars and Church leaders to the recent ‘A Common Word’ interfaith initiative, launched by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute in Amman, Jordan.⁵⁶ On October 13, 2007, an open letter was sent by 138 Muslim scholars, representing every major school of thought in Islam, ‘to leaders of Christian churches, everywhere.’ This initiative, calling for dialogue between Muslims and Christians on the basis, not just of belief in the same God—which was taken for granted—but shared belief in the principiality of love of God and love of the neighbour, as the two ‘great commandments’ enjoined alike by Islam and Christianity. The overwhelmingly positive Christian responses—from the leaders of all the major Churches—implied that the basic premise of the text, belief in the same God, was accepted. Some responses made this more explicit than others. For example, in the response of the Yale Divinity School, we read:

‘That so much common ground exists—common ground in some of the fundamentals of faith—gives hope that undeniable differences and even the very real external pressures that bear down upon us can not overshadow the common ground upon which we stand together. That this common ground consists in love of God and of neighbor gives hope that deep cooperation between us can be a hallmark of the relations between our two communities ... We applaud that A Common Word Between Us and You stresses so insistently the unique

devotion to one God, indeed the love of God, as the primary duty of every believer. God alone rightly commands our ultimate allegiance.²⁵⁷

In his response, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, not only affirms that Christians and Muslims believe in the same God, but also goes to great pains to point out that the Trinitarian God is in essence not other than the One God believed in and worshipped by Muslims, even going so far as to apply Muslim 'names' of *Allah* to the Trinitarian God:

'... the name "God" is not the name of a person like a human person, a limited being with a father and mother and a place that they inhabit within the world. "God" is the name of a kind of life, a "nature" or essence – eternal and self-sufficient life, always active, needing nothing. But that life is lived, so Christians have always held, eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies, and are made known to us in the history of God's revelation to the Hebrew people and in the life of Jesus and what flows from it. God is at once the source of divine life, the expression of that life and the active power that communicates that life we speak of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", but we do not mean one God with two beings alongside him, or three gods of limited power. So there is indeed one God, the Living and Self-subsistent, associated with no other.²⁵⁸

In using this phrase, 'the Living and Self-subsistent', the Archbishop is clearly translating directly the Arabic names of *Allah*, often found coupled in the Qur'an, *al-Hayy* (the Living) *al-Qayyum* (the Self-subsistent). Together with nearly all the other Church leaders in their response—including Pope Benedict II—the Archbishop clearly affirms that Muslims and Christians do believe in the same God.

One might deduce from these affirmations the following Christian argument, which accepts that Muslims believe in the same God as the Christians, but also upholds the evangelical imperative to bear witness to the truth of the Trinity: when Muslims affirm belief in God, they are affirming belief in the Father, the first Person of the Trinity: they thus believe in the same 'God' as the Christians, but their belief is incomplete in the measure that it ignores or denies the other two Persons of the Trinity. The duty of Christians is therefore to say to the Muslims, as did St Paul to the Athenians: 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts, 17:23).

This 'exclusivist' position has the merit of combining an acknowledgment that Muslims believe in the one true God with the accomplishment of the duty of the Christian to bear witness to the fullness or perfection of the Redemption offered through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is natural that one of the main

factors preventing Christians from readily acknowledging the fact that Muslims believe in the same God as they do is the fear of diluting the power of the evangelical call to Christ as the sole path to salvation. What St Paul said to the Athenians can thus serve as a prototype of the kind of declaration which Christian evangelists can make to Muslims: yes, we acknowledge that you believe in the Father, but you are ignorant of the transformative power or sanctifying potential inherent in this belief—a potential which can be brought to fruition solely through the redemption wrought by His Son and brought to perfection by the Holy Spirit.

Alternatively, the Christian may arrive at the following ‘universalist’ position: belief in the Trinity is not the *conditio sine qua non* either for authentic belief in God or for salvation in the Hereafter and sanctification in the here-below. This implies that the Trinity is one way of conceiving of the Absolute but not the only way. This universalist position—if it were to be articulated explicitly—would derive support from the apophatic tradition within Christian thought, according to which the transcendence of God strictly implies the incomprehensibility of God’s Essence. ‘That there is a God is clear; but *what* He is by essence and nature, this is altogether beyond our comprehension and knowledge’, as St John of Damascus put it.⁵⁹

The same two positions, exclusivist and universalist, are open to the Muslim who acknowledges that Christians believe in the same God as do Muslims. To the extent that exclusivist theological tendencies prevail, this acknowledgment will be joined to an invitation (*da‘wa*) to embrace Islam, thereby replacing an ambiguous, theologically formulated dogma of the Trinity with an unambiguous revealed doctrine of *Tawhīd*. Alternatively, the universalist Muslim can affirm not only that Christians worship the same God as do Muslims, but also that Trinity, metaphysically interpreted by sages such as Eckhart, furnishes a subtle teaching on the deeper implications of *Tawhīd*, helping us to see that distinctions within the infinite oneness of God do not imply a plurality of ‘gods’: ‘For anyone who could grasp distinctions without number and quantity, a hundred would be as one. Even if there were a hundred Persons in the Godhead, a man who could distinguish without number and quantity would perceive them only as one God.’ This infinite oneness will then be seen as that which encompasses all things, and as such, is far from a numerical unity; rather, it is simply, in the words of Imam ‘Alī, ‘that which has no second’; for, as Eckhart said, ‘outside of God nothing is’.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ See the (so far unpublished) essay by James Cutsinger, ‘Disagreeing to Agree: A Christian Response to *A Common Word*’ (see: www.cutsinger.net/scholarship/articles.shtml)

² ‘For every community there is a Messenger’ (10:47).

³ See our essay, ‘Light upon Light? The Qur’an and the Gospel of St John’ (forthcoming) in which we address this theme directly.

⁴ It should be noted in passing that Arabic translations of the Bible unfailingly translate God as *Allāh*, which constitutes a strong argument in and of itself that Christians and Muslims believe in the same God. The word *Allāh*, according to most lexicologists, is derived simply from the word *ilāh*, divinity, that which is worshipped. The definite article, *al-*, produces *al-ilāh*, which then becomes *Allāh*, the meaning thus being simply: ‘the divinity’, or simply ‘God’.

⁵ This primordial nature is the inalienable infrastructure not just of the soul, but also of the ‘right religion’. There can be no revelation from on high without innate receptivity to that revelation being present within: So set thy purpose for religion with unswerving devotion—the nature [framed] of God (*fiṭrat Allāh*), according to which He hath created man. There is no altering God’s creation. That is the right religion (*al-dīn al-qayyim*), but most men know not’ (30:30). One of the key dimensions of this soul is knowledge of God, embedded within the soul even before its entry into this world: ‘And when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves [saying], Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. [That was] lest ye say on the Day of Resurrection: Truly, of this we were unaware’ (7:172).

⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dar Ehia Al-Tourath Al-Arabi, 2000), vol.4, pp. 271-272. I am grateful to Dr Feras Hamza for pointing out to me the importance of this passage.

⁷ Another form of the ‘trinity’ is given at 5:72: ‘They indeed disbelieve who say that God is the third of three ...’ This, similarly, refers not to the orthodox Christian Trinity, but to a heretical form thereof.

⁸ It is the Catholic addition of the *filioque* that, so the Orthodox argue, undermined the ‘monarchy’ of the Father as sole cause of the Godhead, and thereby ruined the balance between the unity of God—determined by the Father—and the threeness of God. If the Spirit ‘proceeded’ not from the Father alone, but also from the Son, then there are two sources or causes of the Godhead, instead of one. See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 [reprint]), pp. 218-223 for a concise explanation of the doctrinal implications of the *filioque*; and for a more extended theological exposition, Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2005 [reprint]), pp. 51-66, et passim.

⁹ It should be noted that the word *tawḥīd* is a verbal noun, meaning: to affirm/declare/realize oneness; it does not simply mean static ‘oneness’, but connotes an active quality of integration.

¹⁰ *Al-iqtisād fi’l-i’tiqād* (eds. H. Atay and I. Cubkcü) (Ankara: Nur Matbaası, 1962), pp.4-5.

¹¹ See the article by C. Gilliot, 'Attributes of God', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3rd edition (<http://www.brillonline>), which gives a good overview of various perspectives on this theme.

¹² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, op. cit., p.63.

¹³ Cited in *ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁴ Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* (Fintry, Surrey: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1980 [reprint of 1957 ed]), p.12.

¹⁵ There is some discrepancy in the sources about the precise date of this event.

¹⁶ The wording here is extremely important: *wa-qad tabannwala fī siratibi allati ra'ūbu fihā awwal marra*.

¹⁷ This version of the saying comes in the *Sabih Muslim* (Cairo: Isā al-Bābī al-Halabī, n.d), chapter entitled *Ma'rifa tariq al-ru'yā* ('knowledge of the way of vision'), vol. 1, p.94.

¹⁸ *Fusus al-hikam*, translated as *Bezels of Wisdom*, by R. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 224-225. See our *Paths to Transcendence—According to Shankara, Ibn al-Arabi and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), the chapter on Ibn al-'Arabī (pp.69-129) for a discussion of this theme of universality in the context of his metaphysical teachings.

¹⁹ Cited by William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989), p.388.

²⁰ Cited by Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.254 (translation modified).

²¹ *Sufi Path*, op. cit., p.58.

²² *Ibid.*, p.59.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.244

²⁴ This is a strongly authenticated *hadith qudsī*, or divine utterance, transmitted by the Prophet. It is found in Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah. See *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, selected and translated by E. Ibrahim and D. Johnson-Davies (Beirut: Dar al-Koran al-Kareem, 1980), p.78.

²⁵ The translators of the above-mentioned work render the saying as follows: 'I am as My servant thinks I am.'

²⁶ *Sufi Path*, p.337.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

²⁹ See M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p.73.

³⁰ Tarjuman, 52

³¹ *Tarjuman*, p.70. Cf. Hatif Isfahani, p.30.

³² Cited by James W. Morris, 'The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn Arabi and the *Mi'raj*,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 108, 1988, p.375.

³³ *Mystical Theology*, op.cit., p.39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.66.

³⁵ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies* (Fintry: The Shrine of Wisdom Press, 1965), p.19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

³⁹ The saying is found in slightly differing versions in Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, ed. A.M. Shākir (Cairo, 1949), vol.4 p.403; Nisabūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, vol.1, p.113; and the Qur'anic commentator al-Tabarsī in his comment on verse 6:108. [These references are given by Muhsin al-Mūsawī al-Tabrīzī, editor of the Qur'anic

commentary by Sayyid Haydar Āmulī, *al-Mubīt al-a‘zam* (Qom, 2001), vol.1, p.284, n.54.]

⁴⁰ *Meister Eckhart: Sermons & Treatises*, tr. M.O’C Walshe (Dorset: Element Books, 1979), vol.2, pp.32 & 39.

⁴¹ He is aptly described by Frithjof Schuon as the ‘esoteric representative of Islam *par excellence*’. See his *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (tr. Peter Townsend) (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), p.59. See our *Justice and Remembrance—Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Ali* (London: IB Tauris, 2005) for discussion of the spiritual perspectives of this seminal figure in the Islamic tradition.

⁴² Cited in *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴³ *Meister Eckhart*, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 150-151

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.1, p. 217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.1, p. 76.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol.2, pp. 174-175. In terms of strict Trinitarian dogma this interpretation would be regarded as depriving the Persons of their full divinity, by ascribing to them only one particular ‘work’ or divine quality. All three Persons do all kinds of ‘work’, as each of them is as much God as the other two Persons are, distinguishable one from the other only as regards the single characteristic defining their Personhood: ‘begetting’ for the Father, ‘being begotten’ for the Son and ‘proceeding’ for the Spirit.

⁴⁸ *Justice and Remembrance*, *op.cit.*, p.

⁴⁹ *Meister Eckhart*, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp.339 & 341.

⁵⁰ Cited in *Justice and Remembrance*, *op.cit.*, pp.208-209.

⁵¹ Address to Young Muslims, Morocco, August 19, 1985. Cited by Aref Ali Nayed in his paper, ‘Our God and Your God is One’ (forthcoming).

⁵² Address to the Colloquium on ‘Holiness in Christianity and Islam’, May 9, 1985. Cited in *ibid.*

⁵³ Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions: “*Nostra Aetate*”. Proclaimed by Paul VI, October 28, 1965. Cited in *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *L’Ultima* (Florence), Anno VIII, 1934; cited in William Stoddart, *What do the Religions say about Each Other?—Christian Attitudes to Islam, Islamic Attitudes to Christianity* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), p.12

⁵⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, p.12. A wealth of additional material of a similar nature can be found in this valuable compilation of William Stoddart.

⁵⁶ See www.acommonword.com for the text itself, and the responses thereto.

⁵⁷ This was signed, in the first instance by Harold W. Attridge, Dean and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament, Joseph Cumming, Director of the Reconciliation Program,

Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Emilie M. Townes, Andrew Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology, Miroslav Volf, Founder and Director of the Yale Center for

Faith and Culture, Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology. It was then endorsed by almost

300 other Christian theologians and leaders. See, for the full text, ‘A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You’, *New York Times*, Nov.18, 2007.

⁵⁸ See the full text of the Archbishop’s response on www.acommonword.com.

⁵⁹ *On the Orthodox Faith*, 1:4; cited by Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, op.cit., p.217. Cf the statement by al-Ghazali: 'He who has attained the mystic 'state' need do no more than say:

"Of the things I do not remember, what was, was; think it good; do not ask an account of it".' (citing Ibn al-Mu'tazz) *Deliverance from Error* (tr. Montgomery Watt), p. 61.

DR. MUHAMMAD IQBAL'S ROLE IN THE
GRANT OF AN EXTRAORDINARY PENSION
TO THE WIDOW OF SAYED NADIR HUSSAIN
SHAH: A CASE STUDY OF A VICTIM OF ARMY
RECRUITMENT DRIVE IN COLONIAL PUNJAB
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Dr. Tahir Mahmood

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ABSTRACT

This article brings into focus Allama Muhammad Iqbal's contribution for the welfare of a family that was affected during the coercive recruitment system introduced during the First World War. In the light of revealing new sources it argues that although conscription was never introduced yet the level of coercion experienced by the Punjabis suggests that it was 'conscription in disguise' and therefore resistance to recruitment intensified towards the end of the war. The case study material pertaining to the Shahpur district of the British Punjab demonstrates that disturbances broke out at various places. District officials were humiliated and at times they were attacked by angry mobs. The case study of the murder of a *tehsildar*, Sayed Nadir Hussain, throws valuable light on the theme of recruitment and resistance. People had become averse to recruitment due to the high-handed methods of the officials. They fiercely resisted the overbearing attitude of the officials that resulted into recruitment related disturbances. Allama Muhammad Iqbal had personal relationship with the family of the aforementioned *tehsildar*. He, therefore, came forward to assist the family of the deceased *tehsildar*, and by writing to the Chief Secretary of the Punjab pleaded for extraordinary pension for the family. It was not in the jurisdiction of the Indian authorities to sanction such a large pension. The British sought the sanction of the Secretary of State for India. Hence the family was granted extraordinary pension due to the efforts of Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

Introduction

Punjab had a tremendous strategic value for the Raj. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it not only emerged as the breadbasket of India but also became home of the colonial Indian army. Military prowess of the Punjabis led the British to view them in the light of martial race doctrine. Its proximity with Afghanistan further added to its strategic importance as the possibility of Russian threat from the north-west could destabilize British rule in India. Troops from other parts of India who performed garrisoning duties in Punjab proved to be a burden on the exchequer as they were paid extra allowances. Furthermore, coming from the plains of India they were unfit to fight in the rugged and hilly terrain of the north-west. Under these circumstances the old recruitment grounds of Bombay, Bengal and Madras gradually gave way to the military labour market of the Punjab. This led to the Punjabization of the Colonial Indian Army. Moreover, the British had nurtured alliances with landed aristocracy of the Province. The landed elite not only aided the British to maintain their political control but also served as military contractors for the Raj. By the turn of century Punjabis proportion in the army rose very steeply and before the war the province provided more than 50 per cent of its troops. During the First World War, when death toll rose very high, the depleting regiments were replenished by raising recruits from the same tribes and from the same catchment areas which had originally supplied recruits for the regiments.¹ In this way Punjab made an enormous contribution to the war which was unprecedented as compared to any other region of India. Until 1916, 235,000 soldiers had been recruited from different parts of India out of which 110,000 had been raised from the Punjab.² Ian Talbot, along with other scholars, has pointed out that the First World War highlighted Punjab's domination of the Colonial Indian Army. During the entire period war, more than three-quarters of a million Punjabis served in its ranks. In terms of personnel, Punjab's contribution accounted for almost two-thirds of the army's total strength.³

Shahpur was a key district in terms of army recruitment as it was home of the designated martial tribes of Tiwanas, Noons, Awans, Janjuas, and Baloches. Tiwanas had fought on the side of the British during the uprising of 1857. They took a lead in raising recruits for the army during the war. In the first five months of 1918, the district

by raising 4,920 recruits got a leading position in the province.⁴ In terms of total number of men serving in the army, the district ranked fourteenth among the 28 districts of the Punjab in November 1918.⁵ With the rise of death toll during the war recruitment pressures intensified along with the reorganization of recruitment system. In 1917 territorial recruitment system was introduced and the whole province was mobilized to stimulate the recruitment process. The entire civil administration and the rural notables were involved in the recruitment drive. Colonial state successfully utilized the influence of notable families like Tiwana, Noon, Pir, Sayyid and Quraishi. Quotas to raise recruits were fixed for the *patwaris*, *zaildars* and *tehsildars*, and failure to meet the quotas meant loss of job. During the recruitment drive, every kind of compulsion and oppression was used by the district administration. Some healthy young persons, who were otherwise fit to be recruited, deliberately caused themselves injuries to avoid enlistment.⁶ Sahibzada Muhammad Abdur Rasul has depicted the situation as follows:

Generally an order was issued by the Governor that such and such district must provide so many 'jawans'. Upon this the entire administration of the district, right from the Deputy Commissioner to the Tehsildars and the Patwaris started the operation from village to village. The entire population of the village was ordered to come out and was made to stand in a line. Sometimes, men were ordered to stand naked in the presence of their women and from a family having three or four young men, two were recruited under compulsion.⁷

As a result of coercive recruitment system serious disturbances broke out in various parts of the district. At Mardwal, Lak and Behk Lurka people fiercely resisted the recruitment. At the latter place *tehsildar* Sayed Nadir Hussain was killed. Local notables played a very important role in defusing the situation. Umar Hayat Tiwana along with his *sawars* (mounted men) personally went to the affected areas and accorded help to the police in arresting the culprits. Other notables of the district, Mubariz Khan Tiwana and Khuda Bakhsh Tiwana, also provided the police with mounted men.

M. S. Leigh has recorded that the contribution of *tehsils* in terms of providing recruits was not same within the district. Khushab *tehsil* provided the greatest number of recruits, while the Bhalwal *tehsil* raised the least number of recruits.⁸ Socio-economic conditions varied in the district. Khushab was mostly rain-fed and agriculture was poor that was why its inhabitants joined the army in increasing numbers to supplement their meager agricultural incomes. Behk Lurka was a small village situated in the Bhulwal *tehsil* which was transformed through Jhelum Canal Colony scheme. Its people were averse to army service because of better agricultural productivity

which became possible due to the provision of perennial irrigation. Therefore, the Lurka tribe, after which the village was named, solemnly pledged that they would not enlist in the army. It was in this backdrop the incident of the murder of *tehsildar* Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah took place.

Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah, his family and friendship with Alama Iqbal

Nadir Hussain Shah belonged to a Sayed family and was a descendent of the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him). According to Dr. Muhammad Iqbal he was his personal friend. He belonged to a highly respectable family of Punjab which had provided several energetic and loyal civil servants. Besides Sayed Nadir Hussain, Alama Iqbal also had friendship with other member of his family. His father, Khan Bahadur Syed Alam Shah, was an Extra Assistant Commissioner whose good public service was recognized by Sir Walter Lawrence. His other relatives also worked in various official capacities.⁹ For example, his Brother Sayed Muhammad Hussain was a gazetted officer in the Medical Department.¹⁰ In keeping up with his family tradition Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah worked as a *tehsildar* at Bhera in the second decade of the twentieth century. He was a wealthy person who owned two *murrababs* (squares) of land in Lyallpur District which he inherited from his father. He also inherited about a *murrabab* of land from his father's property in his village at Kals Charachi in Gurdaspur district which was *barani* (rain-fed) land.¹¹

Recruitment-disturbances and murder of Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah

Some of the villages in the Bhalwal and Sargodha *tehsils* were not ready to give recruits and they fiercely resisted in the face of coercion. This led to the Lak riot in February 1918. The Lak village as well as other villages in its surroundings resisted the recruitment. Warrants under the Defence of India Act were issued to arrest the culprits. When police reached the village, a crowd of about 1,000 men attacked the police party. Police opened fire resulting into several casualties. Some of the offenders were killed while several were wounded.¹² At other places district official were humiliated and attacked.

In April 1918 the Deputy Commissioner made a recruiting tour of Kot Momin, *tehsil* Bhalwal. To his dismay he found that people had taken an oath to not to give recruits. All his efforts were rendered futile by a sworn league similar to that of village Lak. He and his team faced discourteous and contemptuous behaviour on the

part of the people, yet he managed to procure a few recruits. Similarly, in June the *tehsildar* Bhalwal, Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah, made a tour in the area under the jurisdiction of Midh Ranjha Police Station to get recruits and arrest the deserters. In the second leg of his tour he visited the remaining villages which were left over from his previous tour. The villagers, therefore, were aware of the fact that he intended to come to them. They sent messengers from village to village and formed a league in which each village was believed to have taken an oath to oppose the recruitment tooth and nail. This allegiance spread like fire to other villages situated in the Kot Moman area and also in the Kirana Police station area of the Sargodha *tehsil*.

The *tehsildar* left Ghullapur on the morning of 28 July 1918 to go to Behk Lurka with the intention of performing recruiting duties and returning on the same day. On such occasions it was his routine not to enter the premises of the villages rather he would make his selection of recruits outside. But on that particular occasion a lot of people, armed with batons, assembled outside the village. The *zaildar* and *lambardar* of the village, who were secretly in league with the culprits, persuaded him to come into the village and made assurance for his safety. He and his team were taken to the village guest house. He was provided with a bed to sit on, and served with yogurt drink. Suddenly assailants poured into the guest-house-courtyard from two sides and he and his party were attacked with axes and batons. The *lambardar* mentioned above led the assailants. The *tehsildar's* all efforts to save himself proved futile in the wake of mob frenzy. He was beaten with batons and killed. His corpse was humiliated and cut into pieces and the remains were put in a sack. However, the government officials reached the spot and recovered the body before the culprits could hide it. It was generally believed that the *tehsildar* had good repute and the people of *tehsil* had no personal enmity with him.¹³ He was murdered just because of the fact that he was overzealous in arresting the deserters and recruiting the people. About his murder, Feroz Khan Noon writes that it was because of his 'unseemly part in forcing recruitment'.¹⁴

Reasons of his Murder:

In the Shahpur district many of the tribes remained aloof from the British administration until the introduction of canal colonization. These tribes generally comprised the grazing community of the district, and rarely came in touch with any British officer except ordinary policemen. They were mostly addicted to cattle lifting. Although, with the advent of the canal colonization these people had settled down to agriculture but they remained backward and continued to lack any sort of social discipline.

Physically they were well built and were potentially fit for recruitment. During the war all sorts of efforts were made to enlist them in the army. As the recruiting activities intensified they gradually became more averse to enlistment and fiercely resisted the efforts of officials and non-officials to inculcate a sense of duty in them.¹⁵ A Special Tribunal was established to investigate the case of murder of the *tehsildar*.

The tribunal decided that his murder was due to the obtruding nature of his selection of the recruits. The evidences presented before the tribunal reveal the complex nature of the case. Both the accused, in order to mitigate the severity of the crime, stated that they had personal motives to kill the *tehsildar*. Hassan Muhammad and Bakht were suspended at the behest of the *tehsildar* from their positions of *zaildar* and *lambardar* respectively. They also argued that on the 27 July at Ghullapur, Muradi, who was brother of Hassan Muhammad was enlisted by the *tehsildar*. On this, Hassan Muhammad requested the *tehsildar* to spare Muradi from the enlistment. But the *tehsildar* refused to do so arguing that this would have set a bad example. However, the tribunal rejected the plea made by Hassan Muhammad in the light of the evidence that Muradi was not present at Ghullapur on 27 July. The accused also leveled charges of ill-treatment which tantamount to conscription. The tribunal in the light of evidence presented by the Revenue Assistant, Khan Ahmad Hassan Khan concluded that the methods of *tehsildar* amounted to conscription but there were no evidences of ill-treatment on his part in the village Behk Lurka, and 'therefore we hold that there are no circumstances which could amount to legal extenuation of the crime'.¹⁶

The enquiry of the tribunal can be seen as a part of the discourse on recruitment methods employed by the officials in the Punjab. This certainly strengthens the existing understanding that coercion was employed to stimulate the recruitment process. This case study demonstrates that coercion was the most crucial cause of the recruitment-related disturbance in the Shahpur district. Although, conscription was not employed; but compulsion and the use of force suggests that it was 'conscription in disguise'. This coercion was due to the pressure exerted by the higher officials on the junior staff to meet the quotas.

The Case of His Extraordinary Family Pension

The district authorities could only sanction a meager amount of Rs.10 per month as extraordinary pension for the family of the deceased, which was considered too little. The family approached Dr. Alama Muhammad Iqbal for help. Iqbal, as mentioned earlier,

being a family friend of the deceased wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Punjab. His efforts bore fruit and, after some hiccups, an amount of Rs. 100 per month was sanctioned as an extraordinary pension for the family.

B. T. Gibson, the Deputy Commissioner of Shahpur district recommended the case for the sanction of extraordinary pension of Rs. 100 per month. However, the Accountant General rejected it on two grounds. First, he argued that duty on which late *tehsildar*, Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah, was engaged did not involve any 'extraordinary bodily risk'. The reason put forth by him was that it was the practice of the late *tehsildar* to select the recruits outside the villages but at that particular occasion he changed his plan and entered the village thus endangering his life.¹⁷ Second, he stated that it was beyond his powers to sanction pension as high as Rs. 100 per month. The following excerpt from his letter shows an interesting variation in the financial powers of different tiers of the government.

I have the honour to state that the limit of an extraordinary pension when sanctioned by the local Government is Rs.10/- P.M. whereas the Government of India can sanction extraordinary pension not exceeding Rs.25/-P.M. vide Article 739 C.S.R. The grant of proposed pension of Rs.100/- P.M. in the present case will require the sanction of the Secretary of State.¹⁸

After the case being rejected by the Accountant General Punjab, Frank Popham Yong, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, forwarded the Deputy Commissioner's recommendations to the Financial Secretary to the Government of Punjab pertaining the grant of 'extraordinary family pension of Rs.100/-per month; half to the widow of Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah, and half to his three sons and one daughter for a period of ten years, or in the alternative a pension of Rs.100/-per month to Sayed Inayat Hussain Shah, eldest son of the *tehsildar* for a period of 12 years'.¹⁹ He explained the circumstances and supported the plea of the Deputy Commissioner that the Accountant General had failed to grasp the nature of the circumstances in which the murder of the *tehsildar* took place. He vehemently pleaded the case by stating that 'I trust that the Punjab Government will agree that in the circumstances it would be unjust, as well as impolitic, to refuse to grant an extraordinary Family Pension to the heirs of Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah'.²⁰

Iqbal's Correspondance with I.P.Thompson

On 31 July 1918, Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal wrote a letter to Mr. I. P. Thompson, the Chief Secretary of Punjab, in which he introduced Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah and his family. He highlighted the services rendered by the deceased and his family for the British,

and recommended an extraordinary pension for the widow of the *tehsildar* in the following words:

I know he sometime expressed a vague apprehension of a violent end, but that feeling never made him shirk his duty in performance of which he has at last given his life. He has left behind a widow, a married daughter and three young sons. I request you to kindly bring these facts to the special notice of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor who, I am sure, will recognize, in some fitting manner, the great services of Syed Nadir Hussain.....I cannot help saying that under the circumstances, such cases should be most liberally treated by Government; and I have no doubt that the keen-sighted and noble-minded head of the Province whose wise guidance of affairs has already brought glory to this province, will take the same view of the matter.²¹

In response to this letter Mr. I. P. Thompson, the Chief Secretary of Punjab at Lahore responded to Dr. Iqbal from Simla on 18 August 1918. He wrote:

I understand that the question of a pension for the family of Syed Nadir Hussain Shah is already under consideration. It is very tragic occurrence and I hope that those who were responsible for the barbarous act will be brought to justice. Please convey my sympathy to the relatives.²²

Reasons behinds Iqbal's Recommendation:

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal wrote a letter to Mr. Thompson recommending extraordinary pension to the widow of Sayed Nadir Hussain due to the following reasons:

1. He was an old friend of the philosopher-poet and this friendship with him extended over a period of 20 years. Dr. Iqbal acknowledged his relationship with the deceased saying "I happen to be personally interested in the matter".²³
2. Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah had a brilliant record which extended over 27 years of unflinching devotion to duty.²⁴
3. The family had a tradition of loyalty and service. His family had provided several energetic and loyal public servants and *tehsildar* inherited great traditions of public service and devotion to the government from his family. "The sad but noble end of the eldest member of the family had not only shown how sacred they held their traditions, and how true they were to their salt, but had also set a most admirable example of loyal devotion to the duty in those troublous times".²⁵
4. The Loss of the head of family meant there were sever hardships his family and children were going through.²⁶

Besides the reasons mentioned above which are taken from the letter of Dr Iqbal, one can assume that the deceased belonged to Sayed family and Iqbal had a great reverence for the descendants of the blessed Prophet (peace be upon him).

Michael O' Dwyer's recommendation to the Government of India

The lieutenant governor of Punjab, Michael O' Dwyer approached the Government of India on the behalf of the family of the deceased *tehsildar* and forwarded the recommendations of the Commissioner Rawalpindi regarding the grant of extraordinary pension for the family. His letter also sheds light on the coercive nature of the recruitment. He stated that the 'methods adopted by him savoured of conscription' and adds that 'undeterred by threats to his life this officer persisted loyally in his endeavours to induce the people to enlist. The Accountant General's view that the duty involved though technically correct, hardly applied to the particular circumstances of this case'.²⁷ The family was already granted five rectangles of agricultural land but O'Dwyer believed that this was not a sufficient recognition of the recruiting services of the deceased. He, therefore, recommended to the Government of India that his wife should be granted an extraordinary pension of Rs. 100 per month for life.

This demonstrates that the entire civil administration of the Punjab had taken a favourable view of the case. Dr. Iqbal's letter definitely had played a key role in this regard. The colonial authorities also had to justify their ruling presence in the Punjab and therefore they wanted to portray a benign image of the government in the wake of recruitment disturbances.

Sanction of Extraordinary pension by the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu

The Finance Department (Pensions and Gratuities) Government of India approached the Secretary of State for India on the behalf of Chelmsford. C. C. Monroe, G. R. Lowndes, G. S. Barnes, R. A. Mant and H.T. Howard stating that the local Accountant General was of the opinion that the duty which the *tehsildar* performed did not involve any extraordinary bodily risk, and that the case was accordingly not covered by the Provisions of Article 735, Civil Service Regulations. According to him the recruiting was not normally a duty having extraordinary bodily risk, but it might become so in special circumstances. The *tehsildar* went for recruitment in spite of physical danger to his life and ultimately lost his life. The letter further reads.

It is not necessary to press this view, however, since pensions are also admissible under Article 43(b) of the Civil Service Regulations, when death is due to devotion to duty, and we are of opinion that the present case is clearly one which falls within the scope of the particle, but whichever Article is held to be applicable, our powers are limited to

grant of Pensions not exceeding Rs 25/ a month , which were considered inadequate in a case so exceptional as this. Liberal treatment is, in our opinion, called for and we strongly, support the local Government's proposal for your sanction.²⁸

His Majesty Secretary of State sanctioned the proposal on 24 November 1919 and the Superintendent, Department of Revenue and Agriculture informed to the Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District through a telegram.²⁹

Press Release

The decision of grant of extraordinary pension was published in the Civil and Military Gazette on 15 January, 1920 as follows:

The Secretary of State for India has sanctioned the grant of an extraordinary pension of Rs 100/-mesem to the widow of the late Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah Tehsildar of Bhalwal in the Shahpur District, who was cruelly murdered by some villagers while on recruiting duty. At the time of his death he was drawing Rs 200/- a month as pay. Five rectangles have already been granted to his heirs.³⁰

But the notification published in the Civil and Military Gazette contained typographical mistake of name and amount of his pay. So Sheikh Asghar Ali, the Additional Secretary to Government wrote to the editor pointing out two mistakes that occurred in the quotation of that communiqué in the civil and Military Gazette and rectification of these mistakes was requested. In the issue of 28 January 1920 the name of the *tehsildar* was corrected and further published.

It should be noted that the late Tahsildar was drawing Rs.200 a month at the time of his death, not Rs, 300 as stated in our issue of January 15. Thus the widow's pension is the same as the Tahsildar would have drawn if he had been entitled to retire at the time of his death and had then retired.³¹

Conclusion

This locality based study shows that First World War entailed a lot of effort and contribution from all sections of the society. Civilian administration, as Yong has demonstrated that it assumed a role of military recruitment at unprecedented level. The whole province was mobilized for the war effort. Civil administration together with the military and local notables stimulated the recruitment process. Our local study gives more empirical depth to this understanding. This study also reinforces the idea that coercion was there in the recruitment process. But it also adds a nuanced understanding that although there was no conscription but the level of coercions and the use of force suggests that it was, in fact, 'conscription' in disguise. Moreover it also highlightst the soft and benevolent image

of the colonial state when it sanctioned an extraordinary pension for a *tehsildar* who was murdered during his recruitment duties. Alam Iqbal was a family friend of the *tehsildar*. He wrote letter to the provincial authority supporting and highlighting his case. The British went extra length to get sanction for the pension from the secretary of state. This not only shows Alama Iqbals concern for the family of the deceased but it also reflects on the fact that Alama Iqbal was equally respected in the Muslim and British circles. That is why the chief secretary expressed his condolences for the deceased family and asked Alama Iqbal to convey his thoughts to the concerned family. This also reflects his love for the decedents of the profit (peace be upon him) which is reflected through his friendship and concern for the family.

belonged is exceptional in more ways than one, and has inherited great traditions of public service and devotion to Government. The sad but noble end of the eldest member of this family has not only shown how sacred they hold their traditions, and how true they are to their salt, but has also set a most admirable example of loyal devotion to duty in these troublous times. Though I happen to be personally interested in the matter, yet I cannot help saying that, under the circumstances, such cases should be most liberally treated by Government; and I have no doubt that the keen-sighted and noble-minded head of the Province whose wise guidance of affairs has already brought glory to this Province, will take the same view of the matter.

Hoping you are well,

Yours sincerely,

Muhammad Iqbal
Barrister-at-Law,
Lahore

Simla,

August 8th, 1918.

Dear Dr. Iqbal,

With reference to your letter of the 31st July, I understand that the question of a pension for the family of Syed Nadir Hussain Shah is already under consideration. It was a very tragic occurrence and I hope that those who were responsible for the barbarous act will be brought to justice. Please convey my sympathy to the relatives.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

J. P. Thompson

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal,
Bar-at-Law, LAHORE.

Information

~~405~~ 27/8 Ad 9/8/18

27/8 Ad 10/8 Ad wife

Syahrane Lahore

27/8 Keep pending the receipt of pension paper please.
26/8 Transferred 13/8/18

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ For details see, Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005).

² Sahibzada Muhammad Abdur Rasul, *The History of Sargodha* (Sargodha: University of Sargodha, 2006), p. 205.

³ Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988) p.45

⁴ M. S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War* (repr. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1997), p. 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶ One of the author's grandfather Pir Ameer Shah (d.1975) told him that his real brother Bahadur Shah was enlisted in Army by the administration without his consent. His friend asked him to throw a heavy stone on his hand. He did so resulting in disability of the index finger. So he became medically unfit and escaped recruitment.

⁷ Abdur Rasul, *The History of Sargodha*, p. 205.

⁸ Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, p. 47.

⁹ Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. Thompson, 31 July 1918.

¹⁰ B. T. Gibbon, Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to Lt. Col. Sir Frank Pophan Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, No.44, 10 December 1918.

¹¹ Sayed Muhammad Hussain (Nadir Hussain Shah's brother) to Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District, 25 October 1918.

¹² M. S. Leigh, *War Services of the Shahpur District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazetteer Press, n.d.), p. 10.

¹³ See the report submitted by J. Slattery Superintendent of Police, Shahpur District, Sargodha.

¹⁴ Feroz Khan Noon, *From Memory* (Islamabad: The National Book Foundation, 1993), p. 77. Also see Leigh, *War Services*, p. 11

¹⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Sir Frank Pophan Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division to the Financial Secretary to the Government of Punjab, 2 January 1919.

¹⁶ Extract from the Judgment of Special Tribunal in Behk Lurka Murder Case.

¹⁷ Letter of Accountant General Punjab Lahore to the Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District vide P.N. 26-1720, 19 November 1918.

¹⁸ Accountant General Punjab to the Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District, 1 November 1918.

¹⁹ Lt. Col. Sir Frank Popham Young to the Financial Secretary to the Government of Punjab, 2 January 1919.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ The letter written by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. I. P. Thompson, dated 31 July 1918.

²² My. I. P. Thompson's letter to Dr. Muhammad Iqbal dated 18 August, 1918.

²³ The letter written by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. I. P. Thompson dated 31 July 1918.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Michael O' Dwyer to the Secretary to the Government of India, 9 April 1919.

²⁸ Finance Department Letter No. 272 of 1919

²⁹ Telegram Superintendent, Department of Revenue and Agriculture received on 28 November 1919.

³⁰ Registrar Punjab Secretariat, the 12 th January 1920.

³¹ The Civil and Military Gazette Lahore 28 January 1920 Additional Secretary to Government Letter to the Editor No.2619 dated 27 January 1920

“EMPTY-HANDED FROM AN ORCHARD”
THE ROLE OF MUHAMMAD IQBAL’S
THOUGHT IN AWAKENING UNIVERSAL
SENSE OF JUSTICE ON JERUSALEM

Dr. Shahzad Qaiser

ABSTRACT

The struggle of Truth against falsehood and Virtue against vice and so forth has not come to an end in the history of Man. It continues to take different forms in different epochs and countries. The development of human consciousness both inwardly and outwardly has put an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of every person to stand for Truth. A tragic failure in this struggle has given rise to the problem of Jerusalem, which from the times of Caliph Umar has been mainly a sanctuary for the Muslims, Jews and Christians. The exploitive forces of modernism, in flagrant violation of the traditional principle of Justice (*Adl*), have sowed seeds of disunity and as a consequence have routed the centuries tested principle of peaceful coexistence. It is a decisive moment for us to reach out to the civil societies of the world by sensitising them on the issue of Jerusalem in the most befitting manner. We have to reiterate the traditional lesson that there is no spectator between the oppressor and the oppressed. Humanity has to realise that only a solution based on justice can be sustainable and guarantor of world peace. Pseudo-geography shaped by foreign interventions in the face of real history is condemned to wither away. The Muslims rightful claim on Jerusalem has to be acknowledged. Al-Quds has to be rightfully restored to the Muslims, who will regain its originality as the city of love. The Israeli attempts to change the structure of the city of al-Quds cannot change the structure of truth. The nature of truth is akin to the nature of light. It is destined to manifest itself.

The struggle of Truth against falsehood, Beauty against ugliness, Justice against injustice, Freedom against bondage, Light against darkness, Good against evil, Love against hate, Knowledge against ignorance, Reality against illusion and so forth has not come to an end in the history of Man. It continues to take different forms in different epochs and countries. The development of human consciousness both inwardly and outwardly has put an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of every person to stand for Truth, Beauty, Justice, Freedom, Light, Good, Love, Knowledge, Reality as against falsehood, ugliness, injustice, bondage, darkness, evil, hate, ignorance, and illusion respectively. Though Man has been blessed with sense-perception and heart-perception in order to remain journeying on the Straight path without going astray, and he has been endowed with freedom so that he could create goodness in the cosmos by virtue of his thought, feeling, word and deed yet he has miserably failed at times to live up to the higher possibilities of his existence. It has led to disequilibrium both in the individual and society.

One such tragic failure in the course of history has given rise to the problem of Jerusalem, which from the times of Caliph Umar has been mainly a sanctuary for the Muslims, Jews and Christians. The exploitive forces of modernism, in flagrant violation of the traditional principle of Justice (Adl), have sowed seeds of disunity and as a consequence have routed the centuries tested principle of peaceful coexistence. The peripheral approaches to the problem do not understand the essential issues involved because they do not go to the root of the problem. The problem has to be essentially understood against the background of modernism that has really caused it and is proving a stumbling block in its true solution. It has to be borne in mind that the traditional world comprising the great religious and metaphysical traditions of the world including Judaism, Christianity and Islam has been the repository of intellectual and spiritual heritage of mankind. The traditional world was ruptured when the modern West revolted against the ancient world and more specifically when it revolted against its own Christian Tradition in severing its links from Heavens. Resultantly, epistemology (science of knowledge) came to consider sense-experience as the sole source of knowledge and ontology (science of being) followed suit by

considering the visible world as the only level of being. The role of reason consisted in cohering data received from the empirical world. The vertical levels of knowledge and being were displaced by the horizontal levels of knowledge and being. The Western phenomena of Renaissance, Enlightenment and Reformation gave birth to the modern West, with its tool of modernism. The modern man cramped himself in his thought and emotion by becoming oblivious of the Transcendent, which he had banished both from knowledge and being.

Modernism displaced traditional ethics with modern ethics. The intellectual and spiritual principles of morality were negated and morality was tied to human finitude, which could not provide firm foundations and thereby pure objectivity to both ethics and morality. As a consequence, modernism started becoming irreverent to the metaphysical idea of traditional Vision. It enmeshed itself in the political philosophies of Power, instead. Nietzsche's philosophy spearheaded the modernist value of brute force, which ultimately led to an unbridgeable gulf between power and vision. Vision was displaced with power devoid of all reverence to the traditional values of Truth, Justice, Beauty, and Love. It was in this scenario that the nation-States resorted to the First World War and the Second one, the reverberations of which are still audible in the corridors of many nations and communities, suffering from this political oppression that continues in our contemporary times in different hidden and open forms. The sense of injustice done to the people in many parts of the world is not mere history but is a living reality of the oppressed people.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the breaking of the Arabian world in fragments and the tearing apart of the Muslim fabric of being at the hands of the modernist forces, gave birth to a number of problems including the problem of Jerusalem. The straitened circumstances have not only caused perpetual sufferings to people but are bringing humanity to a brink of disaster. The thinkers of different ages and countries have been voicing their genuine concerns about Jerusalem, the plight of the Palestinians and the looming dangers of injustice perpetrated at such a large scale. One such voice is that of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) who is one of the most dynamic thinkers in the world of Islam. He gave vision of an independent Muslim Sovereign State, which led to the creation of Pakistan. He combined in himself both traditional knowledge and modern learning. He was well-versed in Arabic language wherein he got to the primary sources and studied Qur'an, Hadith and Fiqah. By virtue of his deep knowledge of the Persian language, he got an

access to the Sufi literature and took Rumi as his guide. He was deeply steeped in the Eastern tradition and had a thorough grasp of Greek thought, Western philosophy and sciences. His major concern was 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' in all its essential aspects.

He learnt many a lessons from the Philosophy of History. His primary task was to emancipate the Muslim Ummah in particular and human society in general and for this, he cautioned Muslims not to remain oblivious of their intellectual heritage and the advancements of modern scientific knowledge taking place in different parts of the world especially the West. However, he did not suggest an uncritical acceptance of the West. Rather, he stated:

Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it.¹

The modernist political forces shaping themselves in his times made him see the modern West drunk with power and unleashing on different nations and communities. He presented a recipe to both East and West in these emphatic words:

Vision without power does bring moral elevation but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity.²

Iqbal warned the Muslims against the designs of the Western powers and gave them a lesson to follow the spirit of religion. He says:

افغانی

دین و وطن

لُرد مغرب آن سراپا مکر و فن
اهل دین را داد تعلیم وطن
او ب فکر مرکز و تو در نفاق
بگذر از شام و فلسطین و عراق
تو اگر داری تمیز خوب و زشت
دل نبندی با کلوخ و سنگ و خشت
چیست دین برخاستن از روی خاک
تا ز خود آگاه گردد جان پاک³

Afghani
Religion and Country

The holder of the Western reins of power is completely clothed in the art of deceit. He is teaching country (as the basis of nationality) to the votaries of religion. He remains consolidated, while you are split up in Syria, Palestine and Iraq. If you can discern between the beneficial and the harmful, then you will not barter your inwardness for stones, brick and mortar. What is Religion? It is to rise above dust (earth-rootedness), so that the pure self attains self-realisation.⁴

Iqbal finds the modern man lost in the outward at the expense of the inward. He says:

Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e. from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness. Absorbed in the 'fact', that is to say, the optically present source of sensation, he is entirely cut off from the unplumbed depths of his own being.⁵

He considers spirituality essential for the survival and development of humanity. He says:

Humanity needs three things today - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.⁶

Iqbal brings home the idea that the unity of mankind is grounded in the unity of God. He says:

The new culture finds the foundation of world-unity in the principle of Tauhid.⁷ Islam, as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile, in its life, the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life, for the eternal gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Qur'an, is one of the greatest 'signs' of God, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature. The failure of the Europe in political and social sciences illustrates the former principle; the immobility of Islam during the last five hundred years illustrates the latter.⁷

He considers the integration of the principles of permanence and change necessary for the survival and development of humanity.

Iqbal's attempt to awaken the higher consciousness on Jerusalem, through his prose and poetry, is grounded in the spirit of righteousness and sounds so contemporaneous in spite of the fact that many changes have taken place since his exit from the terrestrial world. His analysis of Jerusalem essentially remains principled in its pristine purity since it touches the root of the problem. It remains relevant for it cuts across pseudo theories and unjust solutions to the predicament of Palestine propounded by many Western and Eastern thinkers due to their vested interests or ignorance.

Iqbal voiced the thoughts and feelings of the Muslim Ummah in presenting the case of the Palestinians at that time. In a letter to Miss Farquharson on 20th July, 1937 he stated his views on the Palestine Report. He said:

....I think it is time for the National League of England to rise to the occasion and to save the British people from the great injustice to Arabs, to whom definite promises were given by British politicians in the name of British people. Through wisdom alone comes power; and when power abandons the ways of wisdom and relies upon itself alone, its end is death.

....We must not forget that Palestine does not belong to England. She is holding it under a mandate from the League of Nations, which Muslim Asia is now learning to regard as an Anglo-French institution invented for the purpose of dividing the territories of weaker Muslim peoples. Nor does Palestine belong to the Jews, who abandoned it of their own free will long before its possession by the Arabs....”⁸

He says:

شام و فلسطین

رندانِ فرانسیس کا میخانہ سلامت
پُر ہے گلرنگ سے ہر شیشہ حلب کا
ہے خاکِ فلسطین پہ یہودی کا اگر حق
ہسپانیہ پر حق نہیں کیوں اہل عرب کا
مقصد ہے ملوکیتِ انگلیس کا کچھ اور
قصہ نہیں نارنج کا یا شہد و رُطب کا⁹

Syria and Palestine

The tavern of the drunkard Frenchmen may last forever (a satire). The exceptional glass of Aleppo (Syrian city) is brimful with their red wine. If the Jews have right on the soil of Palestine, then why not the Arabs have a right on Spain? The British Imperialism has some other design (It wants to have its hold in the heart of the Middle East). It is not merely to get oranges, honey or dates.¹⁰

فلسطینی عرب سے

زمانہ اب بھی نہیں جس کے سوز سے فارغ
میں جانتا ہوں وہ آتش ترے وجود میں ہے
تری دوا نہ جینوا میں ہے، نہ لندن میں
فرنگ کی رگ جاں پنچہ یہود میں ہے
سنا ہے میں نے، غلامی سے اُمتوں کی نجات
خودی کی پرورش و لذت نمود میں ہے!¹¹

To the Palestinian Arabs

The world is still not devoid of passion. I know that your being is aflame with it. Your remedy lies neither in Geneva nor in London. The neck-vein of Europe is in the clutches of the Jews. I have heard that the deliverance of communities from servitude lies in the development of the self and tasting its fruitful realisation.¹²

یورپ

تاک میں بیٹھے ہیں مدت سے یہودی سود خوار
جن کی روباہی کے آگے چھ ہے زور پانگ
خود بخود گرنے کو ہے پکے ہوئے پھل کی طرح
دیکھیے پڑتا ہے آخر کس کی جھولی میں فرنگ!¹³

Europe

The Jewish money-lenders are lying in wait for the hunt since long. The leopard's readiness is no match to their cunningness. Let's see, Europe eventually falls on whose lap, since she is eagerly on the verge of falling like ripen fruit.¹⁴

He further said: "...Nor is Zionism a religious movement. Apart from the movement, the Palestine Report itself has brought out this fact in a perfectly clear manner. Indeed the impression given to the unprejudiced reader is that Zionism as a movement was deliberately

created, not for the purpose of giving a National Home to the Jews but mainly for the purpose of giving a home to British Imperialism on the Mediterranean littoral...

The Report amounts, on the whole, to a sale under duress to the British of the Holy Places in the shape of the permanent mandate which the Commission has invented in order to cover their imperialist designs. The price of this sale is an amount of money to the Arabs plus an appeal to their generosity and a piece of land to the Jews. I do hope that British statesmen will abandon this policy of actual hostility to the Arabs and restore their country to them. I have no doubt that the Arabs will be ready to come to an understanding with the British and, if necessary, with the French also. If the British people are duped by propaganda against the Arabs, I fear the consequences of the present policy will be grave".¹⁵

He had fully opposed the Report, which recommended the idea of partitioning Palestine. He still had hopes that sense of justice and fair play will make the British abstain from doing injustice to the people of Palestine. He subsequently issued a statement in Lahore:

I assure the people that I feel the injustice done to the Arabs as keenly as anybody else who understands the situation in the Near East. I have no doubt that the British people can still be awakened to the fulfilment of the pledges given to the Arabs in the name of England. The British Parliament, I am glad to say, have in the recent Parliamentary debates left the question of partition open. This decision affords an excellent opportunity to the Muslims of the world to emphatically declare that the problem which the British statesmen are tackling is not one of Palestine only, but seriously affects the entire Muslim world.¹⁶

Iqbal had a keen insight into the history of the Jews, Christians and the Muslims. He had a very sharp vision to see that Palestine was a Muslim problem and not Jewish or Christian. He said:

The problem, studied in its historical perspective, is purely a Muslim problem. In the light of the history of Israel, Palestine ceased to be a Jewish problem long before the entry of Caliph 'Umar into Jerusalem more than 1300 years ago. Their dispersion, as Professor Hockings has pointed out, was perfectly voluntary and their scriptures were for the most part written outside Palestine. Nor was it ever a Christian problem. Modern historical research has doubted even the existence of Peter the Hermit. Even if we assume that the Crusades were an attempt to make Palestine a Christian problem, this attempt was defeated by the victories of Salah-ud-Din. I, therefore, regard Palestine as a purely Muslim problem.¹⁷

He critically examined the Report of the Royal Commission and discovered the sinister designs of the British to hold a footing in the heart of the Muslim homeland. He said:

Never were the motives of British imperialism as regards the Muslim people of the Near East so completely unmasked as in the Report of

the Royal Commission. The idea of a national home for the Jews in Palestine was only a device. In fact, British imperialism sought a home for itself in the form of a permanent mandate in the religious home of the Muslims. This is indeed a dangerous experiment, as a member of British Parliament has rightly described it, and can never lead to a solution of the British problem in the Mediterranean. Far from being a solution of the British problem in the Mediterranean it is really the beginning of the future difficulties of British imperialism. The sale of the Holy Land, including the Mosque of 'Umar, inflicted on the Arabs with the threat of martial law and softened by an appeal to their generosity, reveals bankruptcy of statesmanship rather than its achievement. The offer of a piece of rich land to the Jews and the rocky desert plus cash to the Arabs is no political wisdom. It is a low transaction unworthy and damaging to the honour of a great people in whose name definite promises of liberty and confederation were given to the Arabs.¹⁸

Iqbal was a great advocate of the unity of Muslim Ummah. He wanted 'immediate reunion' of the Turks and the Arabs keeping in view the urgent requirements of the Near East. He said:

Experience has made it abundantly clear that the political integrity of the peoples of the Near East lies in the immediate reunion of the Turks and the Arabs. The policy of isolating the Turks from the rest of the Muslim world is still in action. We hear now and then that the Turks are repudiating Islam. A greater lie was never told. Only those who have no idea of the history of the concepts of Islamic jurisprudence fall an easy prey to this sort of mischievous propaganda. The Arabs, whose religious consciousness gave birth to Islam (which united the various races of Asia with remarkable success), must never forget the consequences arising out of their deserting the Turks in their hour of trial.¹⁹

He warned them to decide the issue by rising to the occasion in a spirit of independence. He said

.... the Arab people must further remember that they cannot afford to rely on the advice of those Arab kings who are not in a position to arrive at an independent judgment in the matter of Palestine with an independent conscience. Whatever they decide they should decide on their own initiative after a full understanding of the problem before them.²⁰

He simultaneously warned different non-Arab Muslim leaders of the grave threat to the Muslim world by the Western powers and wished them to explore the possibility of forming an independent forum. He said:

.... the present moment is also a moment of trial for the Muslim statesmen of the free non-Arab Muslim countries of Asia. Since the abolition of the Caliphate this is the first serious international problem of both a religious and political nature which historical forces are compelling them to face. The possibilities of the Palestine problem may

eventually compel them seriously to consider their position as members of that Anglo-French institution, miscalled the League of Nations, and to explore practical means for the formation of an Eastern League of Nations".²¹

جمعیت اقوام

بیچاری کئی روز سے دم توڑ رہی ہے
ڈر ہے خبر بد نہ مرے منہ سے نکل جائے
تقدیر تو مبرم نظر آتی ہے و لیکن
پیرانِ کلیسا کی دُعا یہ ہے کہ ٹل جائے
ممکن ہے کہ یہ دانشہ پیرکِ افراگ
ابلیس کے تعویذ سے کچھ روز سنبھل جائے²²

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

It is since long that the pitiable is on the verge of death. I fear that I may not hurriedly announce bad news. Her destiny is written on the wall but the Church Fathers (sovereigns) pray it to be averted. It is possible that this concubine of the lustful old Europe gets some lease of life by the amulet of the Satan.²³

Iqbal, in spite of his great reservations, again wrote to Miss Farquharson about the Palestine Problem on 6th September, 1937. He still hoped that the British will refrain from partitioning Palestine and thereby losing the friendship of the Arabs. He said:

...I am very glad to see that the National League is taking a keen interest in the matter of Palestine and I have no doubt that the League will eventually succeed in making the British people realise the true meaning of the situation and the political consequences which may follow in case Britain loses the friendship of the Arabs. I have been more or less in touch with Egypt, Syria and Iraq. I also received letters from Najaf. You must have read that the Shi'as of Kerbala and Najaf have made a strong protest against the partition of Palestine. The Persian Prime Minister and the President of the Turkish Republic have also spoken and protested.

In India too the feeling is rapidly growing more and more intense. The other day 50,000 Muslims met at Delhi and protested against the Palestine Commission. It is further reported in the Press that some Muslims have been arrested in Cawnpore in connection with the Palestine question. It is now perfectly clear that the entire Muslim world is united on this question.

I have every reason to believe that the National League will save England from the grave political blunder and in so doing it will serve both England and the Muslim world....²⁴

Iqbal was pinning his hopes on the inherent goodness of man and the political sagacity of the Western powers, which unfortunately did not fructify. Iqbal New Year Message of 1st January 1938 was broadcasted from the Lahore station. It reflects the fruit of his mature thought and is instrumental in understanding the plight of the modern man and the way to achieve real unity of mankind. His Message is so vital and contemporaneous that it needs to be quoted at length. He says:

The modern age prides itself on its progress in knowledge and its matchless scientific developments. No doubt, the pride is justified. Today space and time are being annihilated and man is achieving amazing successes in unveiling the secrets of nature and harnessing its forces to his own service. But in spite of all these developments, the tyranny of imperialism struts abroad, covering its face in the masks of Democracy, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism and heaven knows what else besides. Under these masks, in every corner of the earth, the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot in a way of which not even the darkest period of human history presents a parallel. The so-called statesmen to whom government and leadership of men was entrusted have proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny and oppression. The rulers whose duty it was to protect and cherish those ideals which go to form a higher humanity, to prevent man's oppression of man and to elevate the moral and intellectual level of mankind, have, in their hunger for dominion and imperial possessions, shed the blood of millions and reduced millions to servitude simply in order to pander to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups. After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their religions, their morals, of their cultural traditions and their literatures. Then they sowed divisions among them that they should shed one another's blood and go to sleep under the opiate of serfdom, so that the leech of imperialism might go on sucking their blood without interruption. As I look back on the year that has passed and as I look at the world in the midst of the New Year's rejoicings, it may be Abyssinia or Palestine, Spain or China,* the same misery prevails in every corner of man's earthly home, and hundreds of thousands of men are being butchered mercilessly. Engines of destruction created by science are wiping out the great landmarks of man's cultural achievements. The governments which are not themselves engaged in this drama of fire and blood are sucking the blood of the weaker peoples economically. It is as if the day of doom had come upon the earth, in which each looks after the safety of his own skin, and in which no voice of human sympathy or fellowship is audible. The world's thinkers are stricken dumb. Is this going to the end of all this progress and evolution of civilisation, they ask, that men should destroy one another in mutual hatred and make human habitation impossible on this earth?

Remember, man can he maintained on this earth only by honouring mankind, and this world will remain a battle ground of ferocious beasts of prey unless and until the educational forces of the whole world are directed to inculcating in man respect for mankind. Do you not see that the people of Spain, though they have the same common bond by one race, one nationality, one language and one religion, are cutting one another's throats and destroying their culture and civilisation by their own hands owing to difference in their economic creed? This one event shows clearly that national unity too is not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable, and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language. So long as this so-called democracy, this accursed nationalism and this degraded imperialism are not shattered, so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as distinctions of race, colour and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely, they will never be able to lead a happy and contended life and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialise. Let us therefore begin the New Year with the prayer that God Almighty may grant humanity to those who are in places of power and government and teach them to cherish mankind.²⁵

Iqbal died on 21st April, 1938 while the British were still in control of Palestine under the Mandate system (1922-1948) of the League of Nations, and promoting wider scale immigration of the Jews into Palestine in line with the Balfour Declaration. He did not live to see the perpetration of grave injustice of partitioning Palestine in 1948 by a Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly and the establishment of Jewish State of Israel. The Palestinian Arabs, constituting more than two third majority of the Palestine population at that time, were of no democratic consideration for modern democracies. It was not only what was done by the Western Powers including United States but the way it was done drew a big question mark on the integrity of modern world institutions and their capacity to provide justice. The forewarnings of Iqbal, among other things, fell on deaf ears. The events started unfolding themselves in a terrible shape. The perpetual injustices perpetrated against them by Israel on backing of the Western powers led to the First Arab-Israel War of 1948, Suez Crisis of 1956, the Third Arab-Israel War of 1967, the Fourth Arab-Israel War of 1973 and the subsequent skirmishes and conflicts till present times. It is very pertinent to point out that the standpoint taken by Iqbal on the problem of Palestine was fully adopted by Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Founder of Pakistan, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, the First Prime Minister of Pakistan and it has ever remained the voice of our political leadership and the civil society.

The injustices inflicted on the Palestinian Arabs at such a large scale need to be registered by the world-conscience, which can ultimately help in resolving this problem. But it is again the forces of modernism, which obstruct the presentation of the issue in its true perspective and thwart the rectifying of wrongs done to the people of Palestine. It is exceedingly imperative to know that modernism did not remain restricted to the modern West. It started invading the traditional societies and weakening their religious and metaphysical traditions. The votaries of the traditional world did not fully understand the modern onslaught and they started importing modern ideas and appropriating them in their traditional matrix. One of the most harmful effects of this imitation has been exhibited in clinging to the exoteric aspect of religion at the cost of its spiritual dimension. It led to conflicts of various religious perspectives, inconsonant with the idea of 'the transcendent unity of religions' and the metaphysical principle of 'unity in diversity.'

Khawaja Ghulam Farid, a Sufi belonging to the Saraiki belt of Southern Punjab, Pakistan reiterates the principle of transcendence, which is the unifying basis of the metaphysical and religious traditions of the world. He says:

پدھ مجوس یہود نصارا ہندو تے دیندار
آکھن پاک منزہ ہے بے انت الکھ اپار²⁶

The Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Hindus and the People of the Tradition say that He (the Absolute) is Pure, Perfect, Unlimited, Transcendent and Infinite.

The need of the hour is that every religion concentrates on its spiritual element, which is harbinger of hope for religious communities. Iqbal significantly brings out the place of spirituality in the religion of Islam. He says:

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 finally be 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 that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality. The idea, however, does not mean that mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the prophet, has now ceased to exist as a vital fact. Indeed the Qur'an regards both *Anfus* (self) and *Afaq* (world) as sources of knowledge.⁵ God reveals His signs in inner as well as outer experience, and it is the duty of man to judge the knowledge-yielding capacity of all aspects of experience. The idea of

finality, therefore, should not be taken to suggest that the ultimate fate of life is complete displacement of emotion by reason. Such a thing is neither possible nor desirable. The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man. This kind of belief is a psychological force which inhibits the growth of such authority. The function of the idea is to open up fresh vistas of knowledge in the domain of man's inner experience..... Mystic experience, then, however unusual and abnormal, must now be regarded by a Muslim as a perfectly natural experience, open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience.²⁷

He further says:

...saints in the psychological sense of the word or men of saintly character will always appear... Indeed as long as the spiritual capacity of mankind endures, they will arise among nations and countries in order to show better ideals of life to man. To hold otherwise would be to fly in the face of human experience. The only difference is that the modern man has the right to critical examination of their mystic experiences. The Finality of the Prophethood means, among other things, that all personal authority in religious life, denial of which involves damnation, has come to an end.²⁸

Khawaja Ghulam Farid beautifully expresses his love of God and the holy prophet in his poetry. He lauds the holy land of Arabia for being the recipient of the universal message of *Tawhid* (unity of God) and *Risalat* (Prophecy), which is a harbinger of freedom for mankind. He says:

مذہب مشرب لا مذہب دا لب ہے سارے آرث عرب دا
شاہد درس حدیث قرآن²⁹

The religious tradition of 'negation' (Islamic Shahadah) is the kernel of the entire Arab heritage. It is evident in the teachings, Hadith and the Qur'an.

بطن بطون توں ظاہر ہويا عربی تھی کر ملک توں موہیا
رسم رسالت رسدا (ڈھولا ماہی)³⁰

He manifested from the most invisible realm. He manifested himself in the form of an Arab (Arabian prophet) and captivated the dominion. He has perfectly conducted the tradition of prophecy (in the form of Muhammad as messenger), my beloved friend.

دیس عرب دا ملک طرب دا سارا باغ بہار³¹

The Arabian territory is the land of happiness that is fully blossoming.

واہ دیس عرب دیاں چالیں خوش طرحیں خوب خصالیں
گیاں و سر وطن دیاں گاہیں کیا خویش قبیلے سکے

I laud the styles of the Arabian land. They are pleasing and highly qualitative. I have forgotten the characteristics of my own native town, my close relatives and kith and kin.

ہے ملک مقدس نوری ہے جنت حور قصوری
بن عاشق پاک حضوری بیا کون قدم اتھ رکھے

This land is holy and shining. It is a paradise of beautiful houries. Who can step in without love and pure presence?

و نچ ڈھم مدینہ عالی جتھ کون و مکان دا والی
ہے دھرتی عیبوں خالی بیا نور رسالت چھلے

I went and saw the majesty of Medina. There lies the custodian of the universe. The place is free of any imperfection. The light of prophecy is shining forth.

عرب شریف دی سوہٹی ریتے لاوے دل نوں پریم پلیتے
دسرے چاچڑ صدقے کیتے آصلوں محض نہ بھاندے ہن

The tradition of holy Arabia is lovely. It kindles the wick of love in one's heart. I have forgotten Chachar (my native abode) and sacrificed it (for the sake of my friend). It has ceased to truly appeal me.

سجھ سونے دا ابھریا ڈھٹرا نیک مہینہ

The golden sun (moment of bliss) has risen. I have witnessed the month of blessings.

حرم معالی روشن ہے نوری آئینہ

The Sanctuary of the Prophet is shining. It is a mirror of light.

عرب دی ساری دھرتی سوہٹی صاف گمبہ³²

The whole land of Arabia is a beautiful transparent jewel.

ارض مقدس ملک عرب دی ہر ہر وادی فرح طرب دی

منزل منزل طرح عجب دی ساری وضع سنگار دی ہے

The Arabian land is holy. There is a state of blooming, happiness in each and every valley. The beauty of the way is being strangely reflected at each and every stage.

ہر ہر قطرہ آب ہے کوثر گرد و غبار ہے مشک تے عنبر

کرڑ کنڈا شمشاد صنوبر خار وی شکل بہار دی ہے

Here, each and every drop of water is blessed. The cloudy dust is perfume and ambergris. Thorny shrubs and thorns are bon-tree and a bearing tree. The thorn (autumn) looks like spring.

عرب شریف ہے، سوہٹی ساری نازک نازو تے متواری
تھیواں واری لکھ لکھ واری دار نبی مختار دی ہے

The sacred Arabia is all beauties. It is tendered, elegant and graceful. I may sacrifice myself countless times on it. It is the dwelling of the sovereign prophet.

Khawaja Ghulam Farid translates his spiritual love of God and the prophet into spiritual love of humanity. He desires humanity to emancipate itself from all forms of oppressions. He counsels Sadiq Muhammad Khan, the Nawab of Bahawalpur State, for example, to attain political and cultural freedom by struggling against the British colonial masters. He says:

سہجوں پھلوں سیچھ سہا توں بخت تے تخت کوں جوڑ چھکاتوں
اچھے ملک کوں آپ وساتوں پیٹ انگریزی تھائے³³

You readily choose to grace your seat with fortune and establish yourself in full power. You make your dominion prosper with your own hands and uproot the seats of colonial oppression.

It is not only a call to his people but is a universal call to the oppressed people of all times. People have to free themselves from all forms of subjugation including the political one. This call of a Sufi touches on a vital facet of spirituality. The Sufi tradition does not teach passivity in the face of exploitation. It aspires for emancipation from every form of bondage, instead. Universal love necessitates just struggle against oppression. But the struggle against dark forces is not bereft of light. It remains grounded in spirituality without transgressing the bounds of tradition.

The religious world, under the metamorphic influence of modernism, is becoming oblivious of its own spiritual essence. The clerics---the conventional and the militant ones--- are subtly appropriating modernism themselves, and are unconsciously using its very tools even in their struggle against modernism itself. Tradition, for example, has never legitimised violence or offence in exercise of one's right of self-defence or sanctified 'private judgement' as against the institutionalised one. It has always warranted justification of ends and means in simultaneity. It has supported just struggle but has taught 'absolute moral constraint' even in the most trying and testing circumstances. A traditional man is bound to act; he never reacts. The ongoing banishment of the traditional view or spiritual

dimension from the mainstream of our intellectual and political life, among other things, has made us liable to fall in the snare of a modernist view of life. Religions need to open spiritual channels to their respective votaries, which will help in understanding other religious and metaphysical traditions of the world, which will be ultimately helpful in resolving the modern crises in different spheres including the social and the political ones. It is essential to open a real Dialogue with people of different traditions and to remind them of their spiritual heritage.

The religious differentiations among the Jews, Christians and Muslims has been traditional and a family affair in Palestine for a greater part of several centuries. It is modernism, which initiated a political divide amongst them in utter disregard of the traditional spirit. We have to go beyond modernism to the principles of our traditions to find answers of problems confronting us in our times. It is heartening to note that the process of inter-faith Dialogue has started amongst these traditions, which can help the votaries to understand each other in an amicable spirit. However, the real success of Dialogue can be achieved if each religious tradition brings to forefront its respective spiritual dimension, which is its essence. A religion, which becomes oblivious of its spiritual foundations has a greater risk of aligning itself with the self-defeating forces of modernism, which is so detrimental both for the individual and society. The psychic forces tend to become self-destructive unless they undergo spiritual transformation. Spirituality teaches us that mere Religious Dialogue at the exoteric level alone cannot reach the heart of reality. It is to be complemented by the esoteric or spiritual level, which essentially unifies diversified religious perspectives. The modern Western society, on the other hand, has to be constantly reminded of her enormous responsibility to humanity. The world essentially requires spiritual awakening to rectify injustices done to the people of Palestine. The Orchard of Jerusalem needs to regain its fragrance.

The creation of the State of Israel, by dint of a manoeuvred Resolution of the UN, is being widely condemned as an injustice primarily committed by the Zionists on behest of the Western powers. The foundation of this State has no moral authority. It is in utter disregard to the Jewish tradition itself. The problem of Jerusalem has no durable solution within the ambit of pragmatism. The philosophy of pragmatism is inimical to truth itself. It is only concerned with the workability of an idea. It tends to treat an idea as a commodity, which has a price in the market but no value in the hearts of men.

In the end, we have to realise that the world is watching with great interest the phenomenon of the Arab Awakening. We have to rise to the occasion and spiritedly set our own house in order. We have to struggle against internal and external oppression in the spirit of righteousness without resorting to violence on either side. Violence begets violence and sows the seeds of hatred, discord and disharmony. It sends a negative message to the world community, which further alienates us from the world forces of righteousness.. If we want the world to understand us, then we have to speak the language of humanity. It is a decisive moment for us to reach out to the civil societies of the world by sensitising them on the issue of Jerusalem in the most befitting manner. We have to reiterate the traditional lesson that there is no spectator between the oppressor and the oppressed. Humanity has to realise that only a solution based on justice can be sustainable and guarantor of world peace. Pseudo-geography shaped by foreign interventions in the face of real history is condemned to wither away. The Muslims rightful claim on Jerusalem has to be acknowledged. Al-Quds has to be rightfully restored to the Muslims, who will regain its originality as the city of love. The Israeli attempts to change the structure of the city of al-Quds cannot change the structure of truth. The nature of truth is akin to the nature of light. It is destined to manifest itself. The Doha Declaration 2012 is a step forward in reaching our destination. We have simultaneously to take creative steps to awaken the younger generations of Jews, Christians and Muslims to their common spiritual ancestry in the tradition of Ibrahim (Abraham), which will lead to primordial harmony. The ultimate solution of the problem of Jerusalem has to come spiritually from within Jerusalem.

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IBN ARABI PASSIONS TRUTH TO
DIALOGUE: THE PARADIGM OF
CONNECTIVITY

Dr. Muhammad Maruf Shah
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ABSTRACT

Inter and intra belief systems dialogue features ceaselessly, because of the new experience and new revelations which bring new challenges and demand new understanding. Emulating truth showcases the mindset of cultures and civilizations; it flourishes when connectivity based on truth prevails. Ibn Arabi passions: Truth to Dialogue; cumulative of universally recognized truths in theological and scriptural material that has usually been interpreted more parochially or exclusively. In a world increasingly divided by a variety of fundamentalisms, theological imperialism, secular indifferentism, misosophical postmodernist belief systems, relativist nihilist and anti transcendentalist ideologies causing *moral chaos*; it is extremely urgent to explore traditional resources for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. This paper highlights '*Truth*', a source for real dialogue between philosophies and religions, tradition and modernity and thus among cultures and civilizations. Ibn Arabi is found aligned with the unified position of all prophets (the founders of world religions) saints and traditional philosophers like Plato. He premises Islam with two composites; primacy of intelligence and objectivity, the most desired in the wake of misosophical and irrationalist. Ibn Arabi's passion to 'Truth' inclined dialogue based on revelation, wisdom, and moral purification; contemplation of love, beauty, mercy, inspiration and commandant makes him admirably to be explored for the resources on the issue of inter-civilization dialogue.

Ibn Arabi would enjoy the company of sages and sage-philosophers of other traditions as all of them were the people of imagination and unveiling and recognized the primacy or rights of the Other, the non-self, the Universal Spirit, the Logos. In a world increasingly divided by a variety of fundamentalisms, theological imperialism, secular indifferentism, misosophical postmodernist cults and epistemic and moral chaos from relativist nihilist and antitranscendentalist ideologies it is extremely urgent to explore traditional resources for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. More important still is to bridge the gulf between traditional and modern sensibilities which seem to be at loggerheads. There have been a variety of attempts to appropriate modern trends in various disciplines in theology but accusations of heresy and inauthenticity have been quite frequent. Religion has been mostly on a losing ground in this clash for ideological supremacy. Most recent attempts at bridge building have been at the cost of religion. Is it possible to evolve a hermeneutic that recognizes the *haqq* of various thought currents that seem to articulate some significant mode of contemporary experience and knowledge? Is it still possible to speak for Truth in the age singularly known for confusion of tongues, relativism and confounding of truth and falsehood? Is it possible to have a decisive *furqan* that denounces error in a prophetic tone and stands for truth that Buddha called the supreme gift? What is modernity worth for and how to show its face in the mirror? Ibn Arabi, the great Muslim sage, claimed to present precisely such a decisive argument of Truth against distortions, obfuscations and ideological misappropriations. He also provides, as this paper will argue, a basis for genuine dialogue between philosophies and religions, philosophy and theology, tradition and modernity and thus between cultures and civilizations.

A few general preliminary remarks are in order regarding what we may call as Ibn Arabi's model for dialogue. This model is neither postmodern relativist or sophistic one that disavows Truth as such and grants the benefit of doubt to everyone as nobody has access to truth nor the one that claims to have a unique access to truth and sees other ideological positions as groping to approximate its privileged position. Ibn Arabi provides a hermeneutic that unearths

universally recognized truths in theological and scriptural material that has usually been interpreted more parochially or exclusively. He aligns himself with what he sees as the unified position of all prophets (thus founders of world religions) and saints and traditional philosophers like Plato. He doesn't base his "position" of no position on any disputable rationalist axiom or proposition. He doesn't take recourse to any "as if" position that propounds cautiously formulated propositions where enough room for ambiguity and uncertainty remains to warrant any interpretation. Remaining loyal to the text with exceptional use of philological resources he excavates treasures of meanings that overturn all exclusivist claims. His is a sharp edged unambiguous statement of some fundamental theses for which all religions have stood and which express the intuition of great mystic masters of all traditions (granting perennialist traditionalist reading of religions and mystical traditions). Ibn 'Arabî demonstrates why and how Islam stands for the rights or primacy of intelligence and objectivity, the elements which our era desperately seeks in the wake of misosophical and irrationalist cults. His dialogues with previous prophets and saints constitute one of the most profound encounters with transcendence and proof of intimations of the higher life of Spirit. Every orthodox tradition can claim him. He has resonances everywhere, in the universe of faiths and philosophies. His notion of man is, arguably, the most comprehensive one in world history. His religious thought is subservient to his metaphysical intuitions. For a sage there is ultimately no problem or contradiction because he, through creative imagination and intellective intuition, transcends all conceptual and logical thought structures and paradigms. At the realizational level all conflicts that are centred on or revolve round reason and language are transcended. Ibn 'Arabî preserves the centrality of Revelation but at the same time pleads for the independent rights of mystical and metaphysical intuitions theoretically available to anyone who takes the necessary pains in self-discipline. He speaks the universal language of love that everybody can not only understand but even identify with. In more than 400 books (according to one estimate) he formulated and promulgated with extraordinary clarity and force the meanings and expression of the principle of unity of existence, which is at the heart of world traditions.

Approaching the fundamental problems of religion and philosophy from a perspective of what Qunawi called *masrab al-tahqîq*, "the school of realization" which is to be differentiated from the twin approaches of philosophy and scholastic theology, Ibn 'Arabî assigns himself the task of not only intellectually knowing but

existentially realizing truth and reality and the rights and worth of everything that is as is implied in the designation of the Supreme Principle as the True, the Real (*Al-Haqq*). Employing metaphysical perspective¹ (which, by definition and as the perennialist authors² point out, corresponds most closely to pure truth and is better called metaperspective or divine perspective due to its universality and comprehensiveness) instead of religious/theological which necessarily anthropomorphizes or rational philosophical approach which inevitably is limiting because of the limiting faculty it uses (reason/reflection/logic/concepts/categories), he achieves, arguably, the most comprehensive synthesis or integration of diverse sciences in Islamic history. He is, by virtue of these multidimensional qualifications, admirably suited to be explored for the resources on the issue of inter-civilizational dialogue. His aim ultimately is to fulfill the human potential for perfection, the vision of truth or knowledge of things as they are (essences/noumena) which is fulfilling the primordial vocation of man according to all traditions.

Engaging with Unbelieving Modernity

How would Ibn Arabi address the modern unbelieving world and overcome the problem of reaching out the other – the disbeliever, the sinner, the ignorant? Modern man is however quite complacent regarding the issue of religion and God. He thinks he has thoroughly examined religion both exoteric and esoteric and found it wanting. He thinks hell is a myth and man must learn to live without need of consolation and lure of heaven. He finds religious position naïve or product of fear or explainable in other terms than the spiritual/metaphysical one. He refuses to enter into the dialogue process considering himself to have progressed into the post-religious age. Most of the important modernist and postmodernist thinkers would consider the option of transcendence/sacred/supernatural closed for themselves and modern educated man. Given such a complacent posturing from the side of secular (post)modernity how will Ibn Arabi find sympathetic audience and how will he establish the case for the primacy of the sacred and theomorphic ethics and prerogative and thus engage with modern atheism/agnosticism? Ibn Arabi can be approached for addressing this complex problem at different levels. Firstly he presents the case of religion in such a way that most of important criticisms leveled by modernity are taken care of. Secondly he appropriates the problem of unbelief in his fundamentally transtheistic theology so that it loses much of its warrant and cutting edge and even pejorative sense in which the theists have understood

the issue. Thirdly he finds roots for all kinds of misguidance in the play of divine names and “exonerates” the disbeliever in a way.

Modernity has many problems with traditional theism. Most of these problems can be avoided if we adopt thoroughly symbolic view of fundamental theistic concepts and keep in consideration metaphysical equivalents of them of which these are not very adequate translations. Ibn Arabi provides such a reading of theological concepts. Here I attempt to present Akbarian view of some fundamental theological notions. Such a presentation, as will be seen, blunts the cutting edge of much of atheistic and agnostic critique of theology.

The Bible says that only the fools say in their hearts that there is no God. The Quran asserts that no doubt can be entertained regarding God and that God is the Manifest Truth. The more they blaspheme, the more they praise God, remarked Meister Eckhart. All things are loved for the sake of the Self rather than for themselves as the Upanisads say. Berdyaev stated that “man can’t exist where there is no God.” Melebranche maintained that we see all things in God. If we accept all these statements as countless generations of humans have accepted until few centuries ago (All traditions have maintained belief in Absolute/Godhead though not personal God, belief in transcendence of Spirit) how can we make sense of the modern “wisdom of the fools” upheld by atheistic/agnostic academia? It is Ibn Arabi who makes such statements comprehensible and even indubitable as we shall see.

For Ibn Arabi God is Reality, immanent and transcendent. In his understanding the Real alone is and there is no distance between us and It. We are already there in the lap of God – we have never been really away and cannot be away from It. God has never been missed. We have forgotten or fallen asleep but this doesn’t alter the fact that God is our very being, our inmost reality. Man is inwardly God and outwardly a creature according to Ibn ‘Arabî. The world is God’s visible face. The real, the obvious, that which is always with us, has been always with us, will always be with us, is God. God is the Isness of things. He is the Meaning of everything. God constitutes all pervasive Environment (*al-Mubîit* in the Quranic parlance) in which normal man lives, moves and has his being.

Modern skeptical thought has problematized an image of God bequeathed by dualistic thought (philosophical and theological) and against the Unitarian view it has few problems. In fact the nonbelievers have most often substituted for doctrines of exoteric theology some sort of monistic or Unitarian doctrine. An utterly transcendent God may be too remote to make it possible to doubt

but the immanent God of mysticism is hard to deny for skeptics. Transcendence understood as mystery of existence too is hard to deny for the unbelieving world. Science and rational thought has not stripped the veil of mystery from the universe and life. As long as one is humble enough to grant this point one can't be labeled as an outright denier of transcendence or straightforward atheist. God is Mystery or He is nothing as Stace remarks (Stace, 1952: 9)

There is no need to prove God's existence; we only need to open our eyes to the All-Pervading or All-Encompassing. For Ibn Arabi, strictly speaking, men don't and can't find God rather they are found by God. Men can't give witness of God but God himself is the real witness. He finds Himself. In strictly nondualistic view God is not sought, because the seeker himself is in Him. One can only get lost in Him. And to get lost is to attain Him. Bewilderment is the highest station and attaining the station of no station is the supreme attainment. Realizing that everything is perfect this very moment or, in Buddhist (Nagarjunian) terminology, that samsara is nirvana is realizing God. Such notions as "sensible transcendental," "Ground of being" "depth of life" "mystery of things or existence" which many moderns have advocated as substitute metaphors for what used to be conventionally called God and most often pictured with a human face by anthropomorphic idolatrous imagination seem to be given some representation in this fundamentally Unitarian view of God as Totality, as Reality.

Because of the fact that in this existence there is nothing but God for Ibn 'Arabi, the question is how to polish the mirror of heart and invite God therein. God is not an epistemological problem at all that our mind/reason can investigate. He is a percept rather than a concept for Ibn 'Arabî. In more poetic terms He is a song to be sung rather than an abstract Being, a Being among other beings. God is "the knownest of the known" and so close that we only need to open our eyes, to cleanse the doors of perception to see how. Belief in God is not a proposition for Ibn 'Arabî but a matter of tasting, experiencing the divine (or the revelations of sheer Being), which, to him, presents itself in all experiences every moment and for everyone – in fact God is the Hearing and the Seeing as is often reiterated in the Quranic verse – and not just to a select few in the so-called religious experience which is a Jamesian construct uncritically accepted by many modern philosophers of religion. All the roads lead to His abode as they proceed from it. God is the name of 'that which is.' He is not something within isness, he himself is that which is. He does not possess existence; rather the very existence is in him. Essence and existence are one for Him.

This is something similar to the understanding of Being as the ground of all beings in Heidegger and God as Being of being in Paul Tillich. Ibn Arabi snatches the “God-given right” to be an atheist. Atheism denies a limited conception of divinity though in itself it is based on a narrow view of Reality. But it is absurd to be an atheist if God is construed as the Essence of existence, as isness of things, as the ground of everything, as *what is*, as Reality. Lest it be thought that Ibn Arabi has no problems with transcendence denying desecralizing and demystifying atheism and materialism, it needs to be noted that he sees the world as ordinarily experienced as consisting of dream though not a sheer illusion, a symbol that needs to be interpreted, an exterior aspect of the larger and fundamental inward or hidden reality he calls *al-haqq* which is his designation for the Absolute. It implies that the modern unbelieving world that only thinks rather than sees with the heart and believes that transcendence is an illusion as it takes sensory world to be *the* world or the only world which should concern us is simply blind or extremely myopic and guilty of idolatry. However atheism nevertheless partly affirms God in His immanent mode because the world that senses experience is the mirror and the symbol of God. It is childish in its veto against the discoveries of more adventurous spirits of saints and prophets which discover God as real, in fact more real than themselves. God as the Self is in fact accessible to all. To know oneself, to know what it means to be human, to properly affirm “I” is what amounts to knowing God as Ibn Arabi tirelessly keeps alluding to a tradition he attributes to the Prophet that states that knowing oneself one knows God. Knowing oneself after denying the illusory desiring ego one comes to subsist in God. Atheism is often on the way to more purified view of God, a mode of passionate disbelief in idols that however goes too far. It is a case of misplaced absoluteness; it misidentifies Absolute with the world. However atheists are true to their personal lords and in a way atheism is an issue only from the dualistic viewpoint of theology which itself is strictly not true from the strictly Unitarian viewpoint which Ibn Arabi upholds. All beliefs and disbeliefs are in the realm of duality and need to be transcended. Ibn Arabi’s Unitarian Metaphysics is transtheistic and transcends both theism and atheism. The Akbarian Unitarianism leads to the realization that the world is ultimately none other than the Absolute and thus finding everything perfect this very moment or seeing eternity here and now.

Ibn ‘Arabî asserts categorically that only the Absolute is absolute and refuses to commit the cardinal error of attributing absoluteness to the non-absolute. Taking only Absolute as absolute and all else as

relative – even the personal God of theism – he does away with all idolatries and exclusivist theological metanarratives. Modernity is a plethora of isms because it has substituted pseudoabsolutes for the Absolute.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s emphasis is on the Absolute, the One, the Supraformal Essence or *Abadiyyat*, the divine darkness of Godhead, utter destruction of subject consciousness before the Infinite rather than on the personal God that comes to be foregrounded in theology corresponding to the level of *wahidiyah* whom he sees as the first determination of the Absolute and not the Supreme Principle itself. Modern man’s problems are primarily with a constricted dualistic theological view of God and static absolutes of idealistic philosophies. Ibn ‘Arabi’s conception of divinity is not vulnerable to these standard critiques of theistic and idealistic philosophical pictures. Most empiricist-positivist-postmodernist critiques look beside the point and based on faulty construction of religious experience. Modern philosophy of religion seems to have gloriously misunderstood the central experience of religion if Akbarian exposition is accepted.

Ibn Arabi, while commenting on the verse that states that “God has decreed that you worship none but God” is able to convincingly show that all people regardless of their belief or unbelief worship God in their own ways though this doesn’t mean all ways of worship or unbelief lead to felicity. Ibn Arabi’s view is transtheist and metaphysical as distinguished from theological or religious one with which modernity and postmodernity has formidable problems. He shows that total rejection of transcendence which lands one in hell is hardly an option available to man. The modern unbelieving world has one of the most sympathetic critics in Ibn Arabi even though he shows that all disbelief is a form of belief. Conceding most criticisms of God-talk he grants that no belief goes as far as the Essence and all beliefs are really construction of the self. As Ibn Arabi explains difference between believers and nonbelievers, the enlightened and the ignorant:

The stages of the spiritual journey between the unenlightened heart and the divine Throne are between the divine Name “God” (Allāh) and the divine Name “the All-Compassionate” (al-Rahmān)... No-one denies some ultimate reality of God... But the station of immediately witnessing God’s “Absolute Compassion” (*rahmāniyya*) is only known and recognised by those who receive the compassionate blessing of Faith. (Qtd. in Morris, 2005:27)

The conception of *Abadiyyat* or pure Being or Beyond-Being of which Being/God is a determination makes it possible to transcend theism, metaphysics of presence and Being centred finitistic

philosophical thought currents which we find in many modern philosophies. This crucial notion is central in handling such problems as theodicy and many other theological and philosophical problems and in fact makes him a true universalist who can be approached from and appropriated in diverse perspectives, as diverse as Buddhism and Taoism or Vedanta and Christianity.

Agnosticism and skepticisms of various orientations in the contemporary world have a point if understood as the declaration of impossibility of conceptually knowing the Reality, Transcendent Principle, the Ground of existence, the whole Truth, the Mystery. However these are often presented in cruder versions that deny men any knowledge of the supraphenomenal or the very existence of the sacred for which the Shaykh will have zero tolerance. The Pure Absolute or Essence (*Dhat*) in its fundamental aspect – and thus Meaning/Truth/ Presence/ Identity/ Reality *per se* – is beyond the human quest and all attempts to reach It, track it, pinpoint It, catch It in the net of language or realm of the finite or time, to conceptualize It, to imagine It, to speak about It, to affirm anything of It are doomed. Before the Ipseity or *Dhat* one can only be bewildered according to Ibn ‘Arabi. The world is ultimately a Mystery, a Mystery of Mysteries and no rational or scientific approach could finally and completely demystify it. The world being ultimately a mystery that resists being demystified by means of conceptual intellect is what transcendence implies as Stace has explained in his *Time and Eternity*. There is no humanly discoverable ultimate truth. All representations of the Real are provisional. Godhead/ Absolute/ *Zat-uṣṣ-Zat* is opaque, deep deep darkness, impenetrable, the absolutely inscrutable unknowable Other. Gnosis consists in knowing that God can’t be known as Abu Bakr is quoted time and again by Ibn Arabi. As the world is not-He and man ever a worshipper of *his* Lord or conditioned by his belief and nothing is ever repeated as God’s theophanies change ceaselessly imply that the world will never cease to be an object of wonder and fascination and Beauty never cease to be worshipped and act as an efficient net through which God catches most of his servants vas Plato also noted. God is ever glorified by every creature and exalted over whatever man can say about Him as Ibn Arabi keeps us reminding of the Quranic statements such as “Glory be to God the exalted.” This implies that the Real or Truth can’t be appropriated in absolute terms. Man must be content to have only relative knowledge of things or God. There are countless veils on the countenance of God which though continuously being lifted can’t be wholly lifted. Man can’t afford to behold the naked truth. The Real has infinite aspects

and can be approached from infinite contexts and thus perspectives. Man must travel ceaselessly as *Kitab-al-Isfar* attempts to argue. Ibn ‘Arabî says in *Risâlat al-Annâr*: “You should know that man has been on the journey ever since God brought him out of non-being into being.” The goal is not reached. For it is “the unspeakable, the impossible, the inconceivable, the unattainable.” The goal is only glimpsed, sensed, and then lost. Meaning or Truth is never grasped in its fullness. It ever recedes. Truth escapes all our searching. We can have a vision of it, rather a glimpse of it through the phenomena which are Its symbols. This follows from the doctrine of God as Infinite and All-Possibility. God is not an object that one could somehow ever encompass or possess or grasp. Man’s quest for the Absolute will have no full stop in all eternity. Life is perpetual becoming as God’s infinite riches are inexhaustible and the Beauty that never ceases unveiling its infinite faces never ceases to attract its seekers to move on and on. Artists, scientists, mystics, philosophers and lovers shall never be out of business. God is continuously experienced, ever afresh in all new experiences. Rationalization, familiarization, demystification and descralization of the world that ultimately make it inhuman, alienating and absurd and disrespectful towards the environment can’t happen in the Akbarian perspective that sees the mysterious, sacred divine face in everything. Western philosophy, as Heidegger pointed out, is oblivious to the ground of being. It is not open to the sacred mystery of Being. It is not the philosopher but the poet who can show the track of the holy, to the sacred mystery of Being. Nothing in the world of known can express the Divine Darkness. All quests end in wonder. In the last analysis man knows nothing to its depth by means of senses and reason. Other modes of knowledge such as intellectual intuition give us another kind of knowledge that instead of making things comprehensible dissolves the knowing subject in the object preserving the ultimate mystery of things in the process. If to comprehend means to have discursive conceptual knowledge we comprehend nothing ultimately. All our explanations, analyses stop at a certain point. Things are as they are. There is something instead of nothing. Being or *wajud* is in the last analysis a miracle or a scandal to reason. Why should there be a knowing subject and why should our universe be comprehensible are perhaps unanswerable. Man knows but little and this applies to everything from God to quarks. God is incomparable, transcendent. Symbols are all we know. God alone knows or is Knowledge. The knowledge of reality given to mystics and prophets is of a different order. God remains inscrutable and the sacred inapproachable. Man’s prerogative is to contemplate

and dissolve in the mystery of being. Though being is aware of itself this awareness has no analyzable or knowable structure. We must ceaselessly move and act and desire. All our movements are because of love according to Ibn Arabi. Man loves and worships beauty without ever knowing why. Love drives everything to the Beauty that there is. Neither love nor beauty can be grasped or explained. This simply is the case. As Ibn Arabi would see it, man, by virtue of his existential state, is poor, absolutely poor in relation to the Merciful who bestows existence. Man worships by virtue of his very state of being a creature. We are here and there is no cure for it. But, more precisely, we are not. Only God is. Only the play of divine names is and man happens to be a locus of their action rather than some independent subject or agency. The cloak of mystery can't be removed from the universe. All human knowledge is progressive unveiling of the ultimate impenetrability of the veil that disguises Reality. Essences are not discursively known. Existence is a mystery and its grandeur and sublimity defy our reason and its categories. Rereading of Kantian sublime by such writers as Derrida or Lyotard is based on increasingly felt inability of reason to contain the brutal power of imagination. We can't conceptualize or represent in language the infinity which human beings do encounter. The highest station is that of bewilderment according to the Shaykh. All this implies that dogmatism is unwarranted. Ibn Arabi, despite what his theological critics assert, maintained divine transcendence uncompromisingly. His emphasis on similarity (*tashbih*) that Sufism has been characteristically associated with never encroaches on the rights of transcendence of the Essence. It is God and not the name of God that religions seek. Exoteric theologies may not always distinguish between the Truth and the descriptions or representations of Truth. Nothing can capture the Reality in rational propositional framework. This means we can only know our inability to know God and this means humility in the face of the Great Mystery that God is. This vetoes all self righteous fundamentalist ideologies. Jaina doctrine of *syadvada* is a corollary of the fundamental mystery and transcendence of the First Principle, the Absolute. This rules out all totalistic or totalitarian claims. Ideological conflicts are based on one's exclusive claim to have access to truth and denying one's fallibility. Religions by relegating truth to transcendent realm and its access to transcendent intellect (which is in us but not ours) veto all quarrels about accessibility to it of any worldly ideology and self-centric person. Secular philosophies that require no moral purification on the part of the philosopher are barred from entering the doors of the great King or Truth.

Agnosticism/atheism, as full blooded secular humanist manifesto would take them, is a product of spiritual myopia. Denying man the knowledge of himself which is the knowledge of macrocosmos and God is denying him intelligence which demands and is capable of certainty and objectivity. Man is Reality, so to speak. Imprisoning man in his subjective feelings and denying him knowledge of Reality leads ultimately to the nightmare of Becketean heroes.

Ibn 'Arabi's mystico-metaphysical exegesis of religion is a great corrective to traditional theological understanding which modernity finds difficult to accept. It is difficult to see him advocating any exclusivist dogmatic theses that we need to contest. The essential Ibn Arabi ethics is constituted by such virtues as disinterest, self-denial, charity and love which form the ethical core of all religious/mystical traditions. God is experienced by everyone who sincerely cultivates these virtues. (Post)Modernity has essentially no argument against these values and indeed affirms them. Ibn 'Arabi has nothing to argue for and against – he only invites us to experience things afresh, to be open to the Real which alone is really experienced in every experience. God is not a hypothesis that one needs to prove or could question – He is the ground of every perception, every imagination, every conception or thought, every experience. He is sought by everyone including idolaters and atheists and all kinds of sinners. To be human is to glorify/worship Him under different names – personal lords of all of us.

Dialogue with Philosophies, Ancient and Modern

In order to understand how Ibn Arabi would evaluate modernity and its thought currents and thus work out contours of possible dialogue between him and modernity we need to see how he relates to philosophers who are traditionally seen as iconic intellectual figures and supposed to articulate a coherent worldview. It is religious philosophers who have been the finest spokesperson of respective worldviews of their traditions. Modern world having relegated religious thinkers and sages to the background is especially fashioned by its philosophers. Ibn Arabi is not himself a philosopher in the modern sense of the term which sees reason as the chief if not the only tool for understanding or approaching reality. His view of modern philosophers could not but be largely negative. For projecting Ibn Arabi as a philosopher we need to refer to perennialist conception of philosopher and philosophy. His denunciation of rationalism and much of what today passes for intellectuality aligns him to perennialist critics of modern thought. More than a philosopher or a Sufi Ibn 'Arabi can better be understood as a spokesperson of the Tradition which is more comprehensive term

which in its more universal sense can be considered to include the principles which bind man to Heaven or as “the chain that joins civilization to Revelation.” Ibn ‘Arabî’s colossal output and contribution and his synthetic view of diverse disciplines from metaphysics to astrology and psychology is better categorized as contribution to *Sophia Perennis* that lies at the heart of revelation and mystical traditions and ancient philosophies which were never purely rationalistic or divorced from the founts of religion. Perennialist authors have rightly extolled him as a master promulgator of Islam’s universal metaphysical and esoteric teachings and have hardly any difficulty in classifying him with other grand masters such as Chuang Zu, Nagarjuna, Sankara and Eckhart. His Unitarianism transcends all binaries and dualisms that have plagued the Western philosophical and theological tradition, and resolves all contradictions in the One, the Absolute, *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Ibn ‘Arabî is a philosopher himself despite his critique of Muslim philosophers and the fact that he was not very well versed with the works of philosophers. He didn’t consider the rational philosophical path as entirely vain. He could be understood as a philosopher-sage in the Orphic-Pythagorean-Platonic sense. Philosophy in the primordial sense of the term that prepares one for death and assimilation to God as Plato said is not a rational logical abstract discipline only and is allied to gnosis, a way of life or realization of the good. Ibn ‘Arabî’s denunciation of rationalism and his praise for Plato – whom he called divine Plato – and thus his conception of philosophy as allied to wisdom (*bikmah*) is to be understood in this context. It is not a prerogative of *ratio* or mental faculty of reason but of *nous*, the supraindividual universal faculty of intellect. It is not a mere theoretical rational inquiry but a realization, intellection or noetic vision that transcends subject-object duality and demands something like ethical discipline that Plato argued for. Philosophy as an abstract philosophical discourse based on rationalistic scientific method and its methodically obtained “truths” is what Ibn ‘Arabî often critiques. Philosophy implies for all of the ancients a moral conformity to wisdom: only he is wise, *sophos*, who lives wisely as Schuon notes (8:136). Philosophy in the traditional Orphic-Pythagorean sense is wisdom and love combined in a moral and intellectual purification in order to reach the “likeness to god.” (Uzdavyns, 2005). It is contemplation of Beauty and Good. This is attainable by gnosis. By philosophizing ancients meant “both noetic activity and spiritual practice” and if philosophy is the knowledge of the nature of things as for Heraclites or the knowledge of the Changeless and of the Ideas as for Plato or the knowledge of first

causes and principles, together with the sciences that are derived from them as for Aristotle and sages alone can be true philosophers as oriental traditions generally maintain then Ibn ‘Arabî qualifies as one of the greatest philosophers of history and most modern philosophers would not deserve a place in the annals of wisdom. The Greek word *nous* covers both spirit and intellect (*intellectus*, ‘*aql*) of Medieval Christian and Islamic lexicon. Platonic philosophy, understood as a spiritual and contemplative way of life leading to illumination or enlightenment; an intellectual discipline based on intellection culminating in union (*henosis*) with ideal Forms is what Ibn Arabi relates with instead of more rationalistic Aristotelian view or extremely narrow free speculative inquiry and rationalism of moderns. Philosophy, understood in the above sense of the term, has ever been alive and recent skeptical currents can’t have any significant bearing on its vitality. It is mysticism and traditional metaphysics that can come to the rescue of philosophy in the postmetaphysical postmodern age and reclaim for it its lost dignity and sanctity attacked by science inspired positivism and linguistic turn in philosophy. The Western paradigm in philosophy can’t accommodate him as a philosopher in his own right because of its own prior commitment to exclusive rational inquiry alone that needs no dabbling with polishing the mirror with the help of virtues as the normative mode of philosophizing. For oriental traditions western rationalistic philosophy will hardly qualify as a philosophy proper and if we judge the tree by the fruits it appears that it indeed is the case. Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and in fact is claimed to be dead by many postmoderns.

For Ibn ‘Arabî modern rationalistic philosophy pursued in secular contexts and for mundane pursuits is not the philosophy proper of which prophets are the teachers. The Prophet teaches *hikmah* among other things according to the Quran (65:2). Ibn ‘Arabî stood for the wisdom of the prophets as his most famous book shows. Ibn ‘Arabî, like traditional philosopher-sages, expressed by means of reason certainties “seen” or “lived” by the immanent Intellect, as did the best of Greeks (8:138). Cracks, crises and emasculations of the discipline of philosophy in the modern West could have been avoided if the West had not opted for Latin Averroism and Cartesian rationalism and consequent dualisms and irresolvable problems that still haunt its epistemology and other areas like ontology. Logos of which Ibn ‘Arabî speaks figures in Plato, Neoplatonism and the perennialists is not renderable exclusively as

reason or discursive reasoning (*dianoia*). That has been scrutinized by intuitionists and postmodernists.

Ibn ‘Arabî denies originality to himself and the dubious virtue of thinking for oneself that individualistic modernism has promoted at its own peril. He says that he has written what he has been inspired and commanded to write, an assertion incomprehensible to modern philosophers. Ibn ‘Arabî, like Sankara, is a commentator and not an original philosopher because he would make us aware of the non-human and participate in it and get absorbed in it. He is primarily a teacher, a Sufi Master, a guide, who leads to the revealed word, the word that turns into reality the moment an innocent soul approaches it after its long sojourn in hell and purgatory though the typical modern hero is adamant to remain in hell and can’t allow baptism by fire to thoroughly consume him and transform him. He pleads for dialogue between the self and the world which both modern subjectivism or objectivism fail to conduct properly. Disenchantment of the world because of desacralization and consequent alienation and vulnerability to nihilism are a result of modern man’s refusal to open the self towards grace emanating from revelation which is geared towards opening ordinarily closed channels of communication between God and man. God responds to human call only when man becomes nothing.

Ibn ‘Arabî, in his *Futûhât*, recounts a conversation with Ibn Rushd in which he explained to the philosopher the limits of rational perception. This was, as Corbin reads it, a symbolic parting of ways between Islam and the West: the West was to fatefully pursue soon, (mis)appropriating Ibn Rushd, an exclusively rationalistic path leading “to the conflict between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history” (Corbin, 1969: 13). For Muslim thinkers, in contrast, respect for reason could not degenerate into rationalism that really debases reason because of ignorance of Intellect (*Nous*) or the rights of intuition (unveiling or *kashf* in Ibn ‘Arabî’s terminology) and revelation.

Ibn Arabi pleads for employing the faculty of imagination and instrument of heart as well with reason – in short reason illumined by Intellect – so that philosophy can hit the right target. Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and in fact is claimed to be dead by many postmoderns.

Ibn ‘Arabî’s foregrounding of the in-between realm – the realm between the world of spirits and the world of bodies or between the intelligible and the sensible realms which he called *mundus*

imaginalis (*‘alam al-khayâl*) – bridges the gap between symbolism of esoterism and metaphysics and literalism of exoteric authorities and thus paves a way for dialogue between theology and philosophy, science and religion and mysticism and empiricism.

Ibn Arabi corpus helps us in clarifying and adding precision to certain fundamental notions of comparative philosophy. For him metaphysics should be redefined as the science of supraphenomenal which is not the prerogative of mere reason and those who employ – being unaware of discoveries of imagination and unveiling – reason and experience only in building conceptual edifices or philosophizing are simply ignorant people. This approach that emphasizes the need of taking into account intellection and revelation would exclude most modern philosophers from Descartes to Rorty from the arena of genuine philosophy. To their rationalistic or empiricist critiques of suprarational discoveries Ibn Arabi would simply reply in principle that the blind are no judge of colours. For him knowledge of other than God is a waste of time, since God created the cosmos only for knowledge of Him. As Chittick explains: “all true and useful knowledge comes from God and takes the knower back to Him” (Chittick, 2009: 50). To secular pragmatic philosophies, to different strains of humanism from Sartrean atheistic existentialist to Marxian and Huxleyean brands of it he would say that pragmatically the only significant question is how to become perfect individuals. Judged from this perspective modern secular thought is a huge failure. It even hardly knows the meaning of becoming man. Modern secular thought can’t conceive of man as microcosmos, as vicegerent of God, as the one who is the pupil of the world and perfect image of God. No wonder there is no cure for alienation in secular (post)modernity. Absurdism is the logic of modern thought ignorant of transcendence. Marxists too have only an impoverished view of human potential for perfection. The fact that they see salvation primarily and perhaps exclusively in the social or the collective shows only their pitiable state and their refusal to take into account our theomorphic constitution, the Akbarian premise that we are made for the Absolute and without knowing It we are even lower than minerals, not to speak of animals. According to Ibn Arabi the faculty of reason which is peculiar to man and which is taken as the mark of his superiority to other creatures if not under the tuition of intellection and revelation weaves around him an opaque veil which develops into an “ego” which hinders man from knowing the Absolute. Other creatures including minerals – this might come as a shock to modern ears – know their Creator through natural intuition (*khashf*) or through an immediate evidential knowledge (*idab burhan*)

but man is “shackled by Reason and Thinking or is in the pillory of Belief” (Qtd. in Izatsu, 1966: 234). Ibn Arabi clarifies differences between different senses of intuition and it is in this light that we can understand perennialist critique of Bergsonian intuitionism as infrarational.

In the Akbarian formulation of integral epistemology we find appropriated all the three traditionally recognized sources of knowledge which include reason, experience and unveiling/intuition – mystical and prophetic. Pure reason can't take us very far and the rationalist must follow the path of the gnostic and prophet, a suggestion that modern secular philosophers reject. This dissolves the problems which have bedeviled purely rational philosophies as Landau has also argued in his *Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi*. But he doesn't reject the role of reflection and is critical of pure intuitionism. Like al-Ghazali he synthesizes in a comprehensive way the complementary demands of reason, experience and intuition/revelation without letting any one way to be absolutized or ignored and thus avoids the sterilities of rationalism, empiricism and intuitionism. Dialogue between different philosophical schools or between faith and modernity could proceed smoothly if this attempt at synthesis is kept in view. Muslim thought never degenerated into an array of incompatible philosophical schools or downright skepticism and never gave rise to irresolvable problems which have marked the history of Western philosophy largely because many of its greatest scholars and thinkers have been simultaneously mystics, theologians and philosophers. Even Ibn Rushd respectfully treated Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabî and accommodated the claims of revelation. Against all relativists and skeptics Ibn 'Arabî believes that one can take knowledge direct from the fount of knowledge which is God or Ultimate Reality and his comments on Abu Yazid's remark that saints take knowledge from the Living God while others – philosophers and theologians – take it from the dead are a standing challenge to all philosophies that fight for audience in the contemporary world. Anyone who follows the authority of other than God (sensory and rational knowledge), declares Ibn Arabi, follows the authority of him who is visited by mistakes. Ibn Arabi provides a possible exit point from the choking morass of antimetaphysical nihilistic groundless antifoundationalism and relativism of postmodernists and other skeptical thought currents which otherwise doom us to abysmal ignorance regarding our most important questions in life including possibility of certain knowledge. Ibn Arabi can't afford dialogue, on equal terms, with those who refuse to listen to the single voice from countless saints, prophets,

great poets and artists, traditional philosophers from all cultures which Ibn Arabi also articulates. No philosophy can sustain man for much time that fails to take account of our eternal quest of light of knowledge and certainty. The blind and the seeing are not equivalent according to the Quranic verse which Ibn Arabi is fond of quoting. There can't therefore be meaningful dialogue with prophets of darkness and ignorance. Modern era is largely ignorance and darkness from Ibn Arabi's perspective. Reminding modern man of what he has lost is not the same thing as reviling the era which the Prophet forbade and Ibn Arabi often recalled. We may share Peter Coates' reading of Ibn Arabi's view of the march of history and signs of the times and accept his largely positive estimate of modernity but we must keep in mind that from the human perspective that seeks peace, joy and blessedness that follows from orientation towards God the Guide (post)modernity is a scandal and though scandals must come as the Bible grants but woe to those from whose hands they come. Never has, in history, man been more lonely, more alienated from the Real, more complacently forgetful of God and thus of his essence and potential for perfection and thus more in need of prophetic heirs amongst which Ibn Arabi claimed to be. Never was the counsel of the one who was asked to broadcast the glad tidings of divine mercy which encompasses everything more needed than at the time when so many despair of God/Love/Mercy and even the finest minds counsel us to live disconsolately or accept "unyielding despair" as the sign of our maturity. We need to take heed of the Shaykh's denunciation of most forms of complacent posturing towards the transcendent which we find everywhere today. God is not in hiding. Every moment He speaks. Every event is a message from Him. To quote from *Futūbāt* "Nothing walks in the cosmos without walking as a messenger (*rasūl*) with a message. This is a high knowledge. Even the worms, in their movements, are rushing with a message to those who can understand it." The only question is: Do we have the eyes that see and are our hearts the polished mirrors?

Ibn Arabi, in arguing for cognitive importance of imaginal faculty, offers invaluable tool for bridging philosophies. He reconciles the poles of transcendence and immanence by seeing the heart as unitary consciousness which must become attuned to its own fluctuations and see God's incomparability with the eye of reason on one beating, and His similarity with the eye of imagination on other beating. Imagination perceives the unifying oneness of Being and reason the diversity of divine faces. The scientific West sees with one eye Manyess only while the Vedantic and Buddhist East has largely

emphasized the eye that sees One only. Man needs binocular vision to see the depth of things. Modern man lacks the unifying eye of imagination and all his knowledge is “dispersion in detail.” Much sought after unity of knowledge is impossible to be achieved without the use of the currently atrophied eye of imagination. Modern physics has been relearning the use of this eye to comprehend otherwise paradoxical reality that defies conceptualization. Postmodern thinkers have pointed out problems with all categorical frameworks and all attempts to eliminate the mysterious, the incomprehensible, the irrational and the paradoxical. Poverty of all totalitarian metanarratives that seek to explain everything under the sun by means of some overarching framework is easily understandable from Ibn Arabi’s epistemology which forecloses any attempt at meaning closure and finalistic interpretations by showing how reason limits by definition and how imagination and unveiling come to affirm the paradoxical character of all reality. Everything being He/not-He is partly veiled and partly revealed and oscillates between existence and nonexistence and is thus ambiguous. Both/and rather than either/or binary logic helps us in understanding this ambiguous character of reality. Between yes and no or affirmation and negation spirits take wings and life displays its wondrous show. One recalls Nagarjuna’s merciless destruction of all conceptual schemes and foregrounding of emptiness of the world of form and colour, logic and reason. Antinomies are there to haunt all attempts at building a metaphysics on the basis of pure reason. God alone is Reality. Other than God is nothingness.

For Ibn Arabi the Unseen alone is there as genuinely real. The manifested being has only a derived existence, given it on loan by the Real and in reality it is nonexistent and will not last a moment where the Real cease to manifest. The natural is really the supernatural. The world of form and colour or space and time is a dream in need of interpretation. Modern penchant for sensualist and empirical epistemology could not get a stronger refutation. There is no external world of which we can acquire knowledge. The subjective element provides the key to the knowledge of the “external” world. Modern scientific objectivism puts things upside down. Those who have not seen God have not seen anything. Modern secular vision that excludes God is worse than blindness. Philosophy (literally and traditionally love of wisdom) which is ignorant of God has nothing to do either with love or wisdom.

Dialogue with Modern Academy

Modern thought is oblivious of the grandeur of man though quite conscious of his misery. Modern humanism and most forms of other

modern thought currents that have no scope for transcendence and man's otherworldly destiny including absurdist nihilistic thought are antihuman from the Akbarian viewpoint regarding human dignity. Nihilists are mostly right in asserting that nothing merely phenomenal makes sense. Man with all his dreams and aspirations goes to naught.

By the standard of *taḥqīq*, which is to give everything its *ḥaqq*, modern academic disciplines that assume God either dead or irrelevant and have little to do with symbolism and vertical reference are “diversions and pastimes for the heedless, because they result only in forgetfulness of the Absolute *Ḥaqq*, who determines the nature and reality of all things in existence.” To quote Ibn Arabi:

No benefit accrues save in knowledge of God. . . . As for their knowledge of other than God, it is a diversion through which veiled human beings divert themselves. Those who have achieved the equitable balance have no aspiration save toward knowledge of Him (Qtd. in Chittick :1998:246).

The following comments are worth quoting:

Nonetheless, knowledge defined by human efforts and heedless of divine guidance is the warp and weft of the modern world, the backbone of science, technology, politics, business, finance, government, the military, and the “information age” in general. The consequences of following systematic ignorance dressed up as knowledge can only be what the Qur'an calls “misguidance” (*ighwā', dalāl*). It is people who follow such falsified knowledge “whose scales are light—they have lost their own souls” (Qur'an 7:9) (Chittick, n.d.).

Modern psychology/psychiatry is ignorant of the spiritual realm and confounds the realm of the psyche with the realm of the spirit. Therefore Freud, Jung and Lacan are all researchers of that which hardly concerns the adventurers of the world of spirit. Ibn Arabi would not be much interested in meeting them. Modern biologists are far from understanding man and human possibilities. Concerned exclusively with the most exterior or the lowest form of human personality and ignorant of profound correspondences and symbolism of this microcosmos biologists have hardly anything significant or beneficial to teach us. Modern social sciences are ignorant of the fundamental constitution of both the self and the Other. Modern poetry and fiction have little acquaintance of the treasures of transpersonal Spirit and focus attention on mortal soul and fragmentary images of Man and therefore can't effect enlightenment or even catharsis. Parapsychology dabbles with the occult rather than the spiritual world. There are some positive

meanings scattered here and there in modern disciplines that claim to be sciences of man. Ibn Arabi's anthropology and anthroposophy is built on quite different metaphysical and ontological foundations of which modern disciplines have no inkling. Modern disciplines lack sound foundation and orientation towards the sacred and thus can't be relied on for getting true knowledge, essences or what Ibn Arabi calls God's *haqq* pertaining to them. Modern evolutionism doesn't know archetypes and thus sees things upside down. Frithjof Schuon refused to lecture in modern academies. Plato refused to give public talk on the idea of the Good. Perhaps Ibn Arabi too would hesitate to hold classes on *Fusus* in modern academic institutions. God and His wisdom are far too exalted to be dispersed in the audience that hardly cares for moral purification. In the Akbarian framework most forms of modern ideologies cultivated in secular context such as positivism, atheistic existentialism, Marxism and other major schools of modern philosophy which have explicitly secular or antireligious/antitraditional outlook are gross ignorance because they are unaware of God or transcendence. It has little room for even such things as theistic existentialism whose subjectivism, voluntarism and irrationalism is in opposition to his non-self or Reality-centric gnostic intellectual perspective), intuitionism of Bergson (seeing it as subrational and thus dangerous, perverted idea) and even process philosophy which doesn't recognize the rights of transcendence of the First Principle.

Mystical vs. Metaphysical Realization

In contrast to the mystical realization we find metaphysical realization³ emphasized in Ibn 'Arabî as it is this which provides the foundation for the transcendent unity of being. Modern discourse in the philosophy of religion and mysticism has focused mostly on mystical realization and criticized it on various accounts. In fact the very category of mystical experience is a modern invention as has been pointed out by many scholars including Adnan Aslan (Aslan, 2003). There is no such thing as mysticism in the East as Guenon has provocatively remarked (Guenon, 2000:124). Ibn 'Arabî's position is metaphysical instead of mystical and this key shift removes the cutting edge of most of criticisms of modernity and postmodernity on mysticism and intellectual content of religion. He puts the thesis of metaphysical realization, which also helps to answer theological critiques on transcendence of servant-Lord polarity in him, thus, "The final end and ultimate return of the gnostics ... is that the Real is identical with them, while they don't exist." It is through the metaphysical realization that one realizes that the Self withdraws from the "servant-Lord" polarity and resides in its

own transpersonal being. The subject-object dichotomy is transcended by virtue of pure intellect or Spirit, which is identical with the divine Essence” (Qaisar, 2002:133). Once the soul or *nafs* has withered away in the experience of *fana*, the self-identity of mystic realization is transformed into the Self-identity of metaphysical realization. In the metaphysical perspective the reality of the ‘I’ doesn’t belong to man or *nafs* but to the Spirit which is the divine spark at the center of man’s being identical with the unmanifest consciousness or Divine Essence. The crucial distinction between soul and Spirit is necessary to understand the Akbarian metaphysical conception of religious experience. This distinction is largely forgotten by most philosophical critics of religious experience. Numerous misunderstandings and debates of theological vs. mystical debate in Islam and exoteric vs. esoteric in other traditions and meaning of such notions as soul/spirit, God/man, could be resolved if we keep these key points in mind. A fruitful dialogue with critics of religion and mysticism and in fact with secular thought in general is possible if we keep in mind ingenious interpretations put forward of many exponents of nondualism in the contemporary world.

Language and the Sacred

The contrast between Ibn Arabi and modern thought is evident on almost all points. His view on language illustrates this point well. According to him language vehicles wisdom and can be a portal to transcendence. He asserts that the world is a work endowed with rhyme and rhythm. He relates poetry to wisdom and divine providence and says that its fundamental principles are divinely instituted. How different and refreshing these views are in the atmosphere of profanation and trivialization of language and literature. The Prophet is referred to as the Master of language and the holder of the ‘sum of words’ (*jawâmi’ al-kalim*). Poetry – wisdom poetry – could indeed save him or at least point the way to the holy. God is Beauty and everything is there to love this Beauty. Encountering the Real in the poetic way is what the key practice of *zikr* aims at. Modern man feels alienated from the world because he doesn’t know how to contemplate and forecloses possibility of communicating with it. Both art and religion are essentially contemplation. In a world where art has little to do with beauty as Ananda Coomaraswamy lamented there exists neither great art nor religion and the great priest and poet of Divine Beauty Ibn ‘Arabî is direly needed.

Faustian Man

Modern civilization dictates terms to reality and doesn't let reality to dictate and this is its undoing. Ibn 'Arabî champions the premodern view which privileges the rights of the Reality against us but which modernity rejected by emphasizing individualism and subjectivism which dictate terms to Reality and advocates a discipline that silences the mind so that the unknown shall speak. Our problem is we are not receptive to the revelations of the Real. Modern man is arrogantly after interpretations, questioning and refining them but the encounter with the Real in all its nakedness eludes him. Because of his denial of intellectual intuition and revelation of any nontextual supralinguistic knowledge postmodernists like Derrida are unable to transcend the relativistic plane of language. Analytical philosophical tradition too is trapped in the cobwebs of language and linguistic analysis and all the time ignorant of its traditional symbolism. These imply that these philosophers who can't look beyond language to the Real that it partly houses are denied the deliverance by truth or self realization – achieved when we transcend the textual world – as understood in the Akbarian worldview. The Faustian man, obstinately committed to perpetual interpretation, doesn't open himself to reality as has been remarked by many a critic of modernism. He dictates terms to reality and doesn't allow himself to be consumed/annihilated by it which is universally recognized as the condition of entering the higher life, life divine or birth in the kingdom of heaven as a *jivan mukta*. Modern man doesn't taste the Real as he has chosen to alienate himself from it; he wishes to eliminate the element of mystery and thus the sacred from the world. Life as a mystery invites us to be dissolved by it, consumed by it. The more one questions and interprets, the more he loses contact with the Real.

Is God Hidden?

Modern man's key problem in engaging positively or creatively with religion/mysticism arises from felt absence/hiddenness of God in contemporary experience. But taken as synonymous with Reality the complaint seems to lose all warrant. God is the only Experiencer, Knower and Actor. For Ibn Arabi we don't see but God sees and we don't hear but God listens. God is immanent in every experience. As he says:

If we gaze, it is upon Him; if we use our intelligence, it is towards Him; if we reflect, it is upon Him; if we know it is Him. For it is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the invisible and the visible. The whole world prays to Him, prostrates itself before Him and glorifies His

praise; tongues speak of Him, hearts are enraptured by love for Him, minds are bewildered in Him (*Futûbât*, III: 449-50).

For Ibn Arabi God is neither absent nor on leave nor hidden as many moderns have complained. What is needed is only receptivity, a polished mirror of the heart and God will teach it. Ibn ‘Arabî invites man to “direct knowledge from the most ancient place. In this way there are no real states or stations to be brought through. There is no platform of understanding to be brought about. There are no conditions to be changed or attributes to be attained. All that is required is the proper response, the request to be informed directly from the most interior place.” He prayed: “Lord grant me as a gift the perfect aptitude to receive from the most holy effusion.”

For Ibn ‘Arabî, every-day experiences are God’s constant revelation to us. To quote from the *Futûbât*: “God has placed His ‘signs’ (*ayât*) in the cosmos as ‘habitual’ and ‘non-habitual’. Only the people who have understanding from God in a special way take the habitual [signs] into account, and the rest of the people do not know what God intends by them.” For him modern man need not anxiously wait revelatory discourse or complain that God doesn’t listen to man’s call or refuses to interfere in history. He says: Nothing walks in the cosmos without walking as a messenger (*rasûl*) with a message. This is a high knowledge. Even the worms, in their movements, are rushing with a message to those who can understand it.” It is the fault of modern man that he fails to read the message or symbolism. He has atrophied imagination and chooses not to see.

One can hardly understand modern complaint of God on leave when we take Him to be synonymous with Reality. Ibn Arabi deploys a series of notions that provide a very different reading of the data on evil, the supposed preponderance of which has been the greatest obstacle in the positive dialogue between religious or more precisely theistic and secular views or between man and God. He identifies existence as such with good and nonexistence with evil. For him existence is synonymous with mercy being the expression of the ‘Breath of the All-Merciful.’ This is one of the most provocative insights and absolutely needed in an age that finds hard to fight nihilistic despair and absurdist orientation of its major thought currents and justify God’s works or excuse him for supposed mismanagement. There is no such thing as absurdity because there is only God mirroring Himself and enjoying Himself and sharing His love. Absurdity appears only when we are veiled, when we see only phenomena. As other than God is ultimately and essentially illusory absurdity and nothingness must characterize it. For those who see essences, who penetrate the veil of phenomena with the light of God

there can be no absurdity. And God is available to everyone though few are ready to receive Him. What is needed is a disinterested vision. Modern man has rebelled against God on the basis of unexplained evil in the world. Ibn Arabi offers to give him eyes to see what he, in his blindness, fails to see.

Comparative Philosophy

If finding common principles of world religions is the most important task that comparative philosophy has today as Coomaraswamy noted, Ibn Arabi is a great contributor to the current debates in comparative philosophy. Distinguishing between the Principle (Essence) and manifestation (form), the Absolute and the relative, Ibn ‘Arabî places absoluteness at the level of the Absolute and this means transcendence of purely theological plane. Contradictory claims of different religions have a warrant only at the theological plane. His perspective though rooted in one tradition honours all of the prophetic traditions – known and unknown – and has a place for even those who seem to profess no faith and no morality. He grants that atheists too have a *tawbid* of their own though it must be a truncated view of it and consequently necessitating a place in hell for them which he interprets as distance from God. (People choose their stations in the other world. God only unveils their reality. People judge themselves in the light of the Absolute. Choosing to live inside the cocoon of limiting self amounts to obstructing Divine Mercy or choosing separation from the Real. Prayer establishes the dialogue between the self and transcendence. Refusing to pray – which is, for Ibn Arabi, simply gratitude to Existence for the gift of life – amounts condemning oneself to self referring and self enclosed windowless subjective space. Hell is self love and nothing burns there but self will as one Christian mystic has said). Man as such is the locus of divine manifestations for him and wherever he and in whatever state God finds him and he is in fact, in a manner unknown to him, seeking to adore God. He disallows condemning sinners such as those addicted to carnal appetites in *Nasab al-kbirqah* and warns against comparing mystics famous for piety with those ordinary sinners notorious for moral weaknesses in his *Kitâb al-Nasâ’ih*.

For Ibn Arabi man needs revealed religion and Law to discipline the self, to purify the mind and move smoothly towards felicity. It is not difficult to see that many Eastern philosophical religions have been precisely designed to achieve these ends and have been employing similar means for achieving them. If Plato is characterizable as divine such great sage-philosophers such as Nagarjuna, Lao Tzu, Sankara, Ramanuja, Eckhart deserve this epithet

preeminently. Ibn Arabi would enjoy the company of sages and sage-philosophers of other traditions as all of them were the people of imagination and unveiling and recognized the primacy or rights of the Other, the non-self, the Universal Spirit, the Logos. If philosophy is a way of life and its end communion with Ultimate Reality and ethics or cultivation of virtues integrally connected with it and not science of ratiocinative arguments or mere linguistic analysis or clarification of concepts then perennialist contention that there is unity amongst different – in fact all – traditions, Semitic and non-Semitic, archaic and “advanced” ones can be granted without much difficulty. All traditions teach the doctrine of two selves, one lower and the other higher divine one. All traditions are for self transcendence. All traditions advocate a vision of hierarchy of existence consisting of a series of gradations from matter to Spirit. All traditions believe in the other or deeper world that encompasses or complements this world. The primacy of the moral but transcendence of good-evil binary by sages is discernible in all major traditions. Transcendence of binary thinking and the principle of simultaneous negation and affirmation serves not only as a critique of the given in both individual and social realms – and thus answer Marxist critiques that complain that religion and mysticism are complicit with the given or dominant sociopolitical reality which is never the ideal and always in need of transcendence or negation from the perspective of social justice and individual’s freedom from most forms of alienating and exploiting power structures – but also allows us to see relative validity of divergent philosophical and theological points of view which are often couched in terms of binaries in divine economy. Ibn Arabi while resisting every attempt to make absolutes from philosophical and theological positions would not be much troubled by such seemingly antagonistic formulations in different schools that sharply categorize and distinguish them in such terms as presence or absence of personal God in them, prophetic vs. mystical, mayaistic vs. world affirming, rational vs. intuitional, pantheistic/polytheistic vs. theistic or transcendentalist, idealist vs. realist/pragmatic, theological vs. philosophical. All beliefs are limiting though have some truth at their own levels. The perfect man can accommodate all the sects that there are as Rumi, Ibn Arabi’s contemporary said in his famous *Diwani Shams-e Tabrizi*, or appropriate all points of view or beliefs seeing the aspect of truth in all of them but without identifying with any of them as Ibn Arabi would like to put it. Dualistic binary thinking is transcended in the metaphysical standpoint as knowing and being become one. By excluding modern episteme on principle

grounds – dubbing it ignorant of the twin sources of knowledge intellection and revelation and ignorant of the self and committed to false views of scientism, evolutionism and progress and the cult of the ugly – the Akbarian framework would be able to make sense of traditional religious and wisdom traditions including the much misunderstood and wrongly reviled archaic traditions which preserve the essentials of metaphysical worldview though couched in mythological or difficult symbolic language. Philosophies are not static or monolithic but do evolve in some sense though not in the manner conceived by most modern historians of philosophy. That there can be no new discovery of truth concerning our ultimate destiny and most fundamental issues – and man is advised to be passive recipient of knowledge from the only Knower by perfecting the art of contemplation which might demand retreats in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi discipline for achieving poverty of spirit or renunciation/detachment – to use preferred expression from Christian and Indian traditions – is a claim that runs counter to modernist evolutionary thinking. Humanism and individualism are the prime follies of modern age against which Ibn Arabi keeps guard though he recognizes the metaphysical reality of the subject when it comes to subsist in the state of *baqa* after passing through the stage of *fana* which burns the dross of carnal self. Ibn Arabi is ultimately underscoring clearly and unambiguously the unity of all human endeavours at all planes as he foregrounds the sacred science – *scientia sacra* – of metaphysics, the realization of the One as Infinite and All-Possibility and the essence of everything that comprehensively provides a foundation for all sciences and arts and thus for unity of knowledge which modern world misses so terribly.

The themes of spiritual ascension, irreducible centrality of the individual spiritual relationship to God, universal guidance and recognition of plurality of beliefs as, everyone being under specific Lord, preeminence of divine mercy and “spiritual realism” are amongst the important features of Akbarian thought that not only question all exclusivist ideologies and also provide a perspective to accommodate divergent claims of rationalism, traditionalist theology and spiritual “unveiling” and a defense of creativity and diversity of spiritual expressions. Ibn ‘Arabî shows why religious diversity is demanded by the very nature of things and why we must welcome it as there is great good in it. He is not for theological uniformitarianism. He supports the theses upheld by perennialists and many others regarding transcendent unity of religions. His pluralism doesn’t entail rejection of respect for the parent tradition

and even certain exclusivity of the latter which is necessarily associated with all belief systems.

The Akbarian distinction between the planes of *Abdiyyat* and *Wahdiyyat* has important implications in reconciling apparently divergent Semitic and non-Semitic or more specifically theistic and transtheistic theologies as the perennialist attempt based on the distinction between Beyond-Being and Being shows. Positing Absolute as more primordial conception of Divinity (which is to be found in all major traditions) reconciles “atheistic” or transtheistic Buddhism and Taoism with Semitic theism. No religion absolutizes personal God. The key importance of the notion of Divine Relativity or what Vedantic thinkers call as *Maya* in Ibn Arabi is an important tool in the dialogue of theologies or religions. Perennialist defence of transcendent unity of religions is very much indebted to this concept. Frithjof Schuon time and again turns to this concept in many works including *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* and *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*. The Shaykh’s masterful reconciliation of otherwise divergent conceptions of creation *ex nihilo* and emanationist accounts or creation/manifestation ideas which have been seen as distinguishing point between Muslim philosophical/Vedantic and Semitic theological approaches.

Ibn Arabi displays remarkable gifts for putting seemingly opposite theological/philosophical conceptions in proper perspective in order to reconcile them. This is an important qualification for doing comparative philosophy. By having recourse to the fixity of entities in the divine knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabî traces the dispute between theologians and philosophers over the eternity of the world back to their perception of the entities. Those who maintain that the world is eternal have understood that “the Real is never qualified by first not seeing the cosmos, then seeing it. On the contrary, He never ceases seeing it.” Those who maintain that the world is qualified by new arrival (*hudûth*) “consider the existence of the cosmos in relation to its own entity,” which is nonexistent. Hence they understand that it must have come into existence (*Futûbhât*, II:666). This is only one example of Ibn Arabi’s style of resolving disputes between rival schools and interpretation such as regarding free will and determinism, Quran’s createdness etc. He would even extend his reconciliatory hermeneutic to idolatry vs. monotheism controversy and even to divergent religious beliefs. He reconciles different seeming oppositions by the familiar method of logic of polarities that juxtaposes opposites while both affirming and negating them seeing them aspects of higher unifying principle. The way he approaches Lord-servant polarity is illustrative of his general approach. By

affirming similarity and incomparability or immanence and transcendence of the Real which is the essence of everything and manifest in all the limitless forms and all polarities he sees our knowledge of everything characterized by this fundamental yes/no or similarity/incomparability binary.

He can provide the paradigm in which we could appropriate not only the great traditional philosophers like Plato and Plotinus, Nagarjuna and Sankara, Eckhart and Cusanus, Chaung Zu and Lao Tzu, Dogen and Confucius (serious attempts have been made in this direction already) but the saints of all hues, from almost all traditions and even modern philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. In fact the whole gamut of Tradition, as the perennialists use the term, is his province. Buddhism and antiessentialist postmodern thought could be read, without much stretching, as proving the negative part of the thesis of Ibn ‘Arabî regarding essential nothingness of all phenomena. His metaphysical view of the Muhammad as the Principle of Manifestation, as positivity of manifestation, as Logos rather than a mere historical personality can hardly be characterized as exclusivist. All prophets partake of the Logos that is Muhammad. Being that which manifests or unveils Essence the Messenger is green in the leaves, red in the roses and gold in the rays of the sun. He is this life in its positivity, in its totality. And he is the silence of the darkness. And he is the joy of abounding life of the world.

He provides a possible approach to achieve unity of sciences or knowledge which is increasingly becoming difficult to achieve for modern education. He leads to an all-inclusive point of view, which is not limited to the world of nature, or to humanity, to science, economics or religion, but which sees all of these as faces of a single reality described by the doctrine of unity the kernel of which is, in the apt words of Young,

love and the love of that love, which is movement and life, and the perfection of completion, simple, positive, joyful news of their intrinsic and inseparable unity with their origin, offering freedom from the tyranny of the thought of otherness, in exchange for the certainty in one, absolute and all-embracing Reality, to Which, to Whom all service is due (Young 1999).

His Absolute doesn’t engulf the concrete existential individuality and the awful reality of suffering that marks the odyssey of life. He charts out a method to move from majestic to beautiful names of God and thus securing the rights of the man of flesh and blood with all his agonies. His God is not just a cold unconcerned impersonal divinity but living personal one also which responds to prayer of every individual and even lauds human “weakness” to complain

about all kinds of pains. Existentialists would hardly have any problem with the account of concrete human individuality presented by Ibn Arabi even if it is Absolute centric and essentialist metaphysics to which he remains committed. Ibn Arabi's "system" demonstrates that there is much that is wrong with modern man's understanding of metaphysics. Metaphysics is not an abstraction, existence devaluing essentialism, a supraindividualism that fails to take ample note of the individual with all his frailties, atemporal ahistorical bragging of eternity that brackets off temporality and history, a dissolution of the finite in the Infinite but recognition of the integral reality of plurality or diversity in the One or the Infinite itself which otherwise divorced from the mirror of attributes that the world of form and colour is gets reduced to empty abstraction. Ibn Arabi's Absolute is not static but dynamic ever revealing or manifesting itself, eternally in love with its exteriorized manifestations, realizing other modes of perfection in spatio-temporal realm, even in what is called as sin and failure. Thus passion, thought and will all are real in the life of God which is the life of everything.

It is religion taken as a metanarrative, a system, an ideology explaining things, as privileging of the otherworld or eternity at the cost of this world and time here-now, elaborate creedal formulae coached in terms of propositions privileging the religious as distinct from or opposite to the secular, as unqualified belief in the representation of Reality and their absolutist exclusivism that Ibn Arabi pleads for transcending by virtue of his Unitarianism that puts the Real at the centre while questioning absolutization of all conceptions and theorizations of It. The Real is the essence of everything and no dualistic apprehension or categorical framework can capture it. It is the totality of all existents, a metaphysical whole that can't be reduced to an object of knowledge by a subject that is thought to be separate from the object. All this implies that meaning closure, epistemic chauvinism, totalistic thought and consequent war on the basis of a particular conception or delimitation of the Reality/ Truth are unwarranted. Truth rather than discourse *about* Truth which is the prerogative of exoteric theology and rational philosophy is what the gnostic comes to realize and as it is the One and All it necessarily follows that the knower transcends all particular beliefs and views. Living Truth, dissolving in Truth rather than talking about it and fighting for it is the way to end all conflicts that arise from dualistic theological and rationalistic philosophical approaches.

Ibn Arabi avoids self defeating relativism and agnosticism that knows no Absolute by putting Absolute at the centre and declaring

that personal knowledge of the Real is possible. This knowledge is not the conceptual knowledge but realizational knowledge where the subject is identified with the object and one becomes knowledge itself. Man is made for the Absolute and has access to It though not conceptually or discursively. This avoids nihilism and relativist anarchism that bedevils postmodernism by recognizing relative truth of all human understandings as the Absolute manifests itself differently in different forms and different souls. It also provides a framework for appreciating all viewpoints and all beliefs while acknowledging their relativity. Secular philosophical and scientific thought can be put in the proper perspective without conceding its absolutist claims but conceding at the same time that it is one way of approaching the God identified with the Era and that nothing happens except in strict conformity to the requirements of divergent Divine Names.

We can't label Ibn Arabi's description of Unitarianism as the "Islamic concept of unity" or some such thing. There is only one reality and it transcends all human views of it. He builds his thesis on the most universal of categories – existence or being. The Quran is not a perspective among other perspectives on Truth or Existence but simply an invitation to be open to Truth or Reality. "It is the description of Existence as it is." And it is "this understanding of existence which lies at the core of all the true religious and philosophical traditions – that has always been at once the starting point and the goal of human knowledge."

Dialogue with other Sects and Religions

Ibn Arabi was self avowedly a Muslim who affirmed all the articles of faith that traditional Sunni Islam upholds. He takes Islam to be the perfection of religions and for him Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, appropriates all the perfections of previous prophets. The detailed statement of his beliefs at the beginning of *Futûhât* shows his commitment to all the important articles of traditional Sunni Islam. He critiqued Judaism and Christianity on different grounds and wrote for holy war against Christians at a time when Muslims were under invasion from them. He criticized many religious sects and unambiguously expressed his inclination for Sunni Islam. He is emphatic that felicity is attainable only through *tawhid* though he is not very well informed about non-Semitic traditions and his reading of Judaism and Christianity need not be wholly accepted. His complex relationship with other sects and traditions is best understood, in my opinion, from the perennialist perspective. He grants that in later times as the second coming of Jesus comes closer

the secrets of other traditions will be better accessed and he himself has primarily unveiled the secrets of Islam only.

Exoteric vs. Esoteric Approaches

Ibn ‘Arabi’s approach dissolves the much hyped conflict between exoteric and esoteric perspectives in religions, the thesis of two truths that we find across many traditions. This puts in perspective the religion of the masses and the mystical/philosophical elite without denigrating the former. His catholicity and universality is thus attested in his inclusive view of diverse spiritualities and religious practices. By asserting that man sees only himself when he claims to see God as the Essence never unveils and God reveals Himself according to man’s belief and emphatically asserting that it is bewilderment and perplexity that overtakes all travellers on the path and all knowers he questions all grounds that anyone may deploy for special. The more further one moves forward on the path, the clearer it becomes to the traveller the realization of his progressive ignorance until at the end of the path one knows that one can’t know the Essence. One does progress in spiritual knowledge and witnesses normally unseen realities as one progresses on spiritual journey but not as a knower that could justify the claim of one being a special person. As God is the only knower and it is levels rather than individuals to which the appellation of higher or lower is attachable according to the Shaykh there remains no ground whatsoever for epistemic chauvinism or for ‘more knowledgeable than thou’ attitude. The Shaykh saw himself as heir to guardian of prophetic wisdom and thus sacred law which is respectful of dualities at the plane of relativity. Prophets address all people irrespective of intellectual or spiritual attainments of the addressee. Of course everyone will interpret their words according to one’s ability or spiritual attainment. None is above law. Humility is the royal road to God for all and sundry. The highest station is becoming pure servant where no trace of Lordship remains as Ibn Arabi describes about himself this station. It is Pharonic attitude to claim lordship and Satanic attitude to assert one’s superiority. Ibn Arabi’s is a mysticism respectful of law and *haqiqah* identical with *sha’riah*. His respect for the sacred law is so unambiguously stated in his understanding of *furqan* that one hardly needs to refute his theological critics who accuse him of nullifying divine commandments or erasing distinction between lawful and unlawful. To quote him:

He who stops with the Quran inasmuch as it is a *qur’ân* has but a single eye that unifies and brings together.... however, it is a *furqân*.... When I tasted the latter..., I said, “This is lawful, that is unlawful, and this is indifferent. The schools have become various and the religions diverse.

The levels have been distinguished, the divine names and the engendered traces have become manifest, and the names and the gods have become many in the world (*Futūḥāt*, III:94).

Ibn Arabi's synthetic view should not be confounded with modern eclecticism and uniformitarianism or "all is okay" cheap spirituality or some interpretations of *anekantvada* that liquidate the claim of absoluteness of truth or loss of distinction between truth and falsehood. He has very precisely formulated doctrines. His pluralism doesn't mean he is for everything or everything could be read in him. We need formal religion. New Age spirituality and NeoVedantic antinomian mysticism and libertine spirituality of many famous modern mystics would be emphatically rejected in his worldview. Even many modern appropriations of Sufism that involve wild dancing and music performances without observing prescribed requirements as defined by masters has no warrant from Akbarian viewpoint. Addas has quoted his condemnation of *shahid baṣṣi* (contemplation of beautiful young men to provoke ecstasy), *sama* (communal spiritual recital) etc. in this connection (Addas, 1993:163).

Against the Cartesean construction of man as body and soul Ibn 'Arabî follows the traditional ternary division of body, soul and spirit. Because the soul dwells in an in-between realm it must choose to strive for transformation and realization. 'All is ok' or 'feel good' spirituality quite popular today is therefore simply a simplification and naivety. The sacred law is important for keeping the body and soul in the service of spirit. Against those extreme idealists and monists who find hardly any reality in body and soul, in their great struggles, falls and jumps and in the name of Unitarianism declare time to be illusory, the world to be a unreal distraction, the body to be a prison he is for integral view of man which recognizes the rights of body, soul and spirit. Below the level of Absolute personal God and finite self of the servant are real. The servant must unceasingly pray. Body imposes limitations and therefore man is not God. The Spirit alone is one with God. The body and soul are not. Servitude can't be denied, the reality of individual self can't be wished away as long as we exist as entities in space and time. Absolute unification is not possible. God ever remains the exalted – and of this Ibn Arabi doesn't tire of reminding us. One must guard against "spiritual Titanism." The insights of Semitic religions and theologies that emphasize our in-between nature – that we are situated between earth and heaven, time and eternity, beasts and angels, existence and non-existence and are in Rumi's words "midway between, and struggling" – and distinction of the Creator and the created are there to stay. For Ibn 'Arabî we are situated in this world but really belong to the next and are "at a doorway between existence and non-existence."

Dialogue with the Other and Theomorphic Ethics

Modern world is largely convinced that ethics is relative and everything is permissible. There is no ontological foundation for ethics. There are some isolated thinkers who challenge dominant model but in almost all spheres of secular life there are no imperatives like those bequeathed by religions. In contrast Ibn Arabi's Sufi ethics is grounded in ontology. Noble character traits are not merely extraneous qualities that have no bearing upon our mode of existence. They define our mode of existence and the extent to which we participate in the fullness of the Light of Being. There exists certain hierarchy among the divine names and it depends on their ontological status which names should be acquired and which should be avoided (Chittick, 2009: 22-23). The general rule is that attributes of beauty need to be foregrounded in accordance with the prophetic saying that Divine Mercy precedes His Wrath. This means that ethical commandments of the Law have to be observed if man desires felicity. Modern wishy washy do goodism or absolutization of ethical relativism or de Sadean and ethics complicit with Capitalism and other power centric ideologies are not compatible with Ibn Arabi's theomorphic ethics. Capitalism and State Capitalism disguised as Marxism have little room for attributes of beauty. There is no warrant for ignoring the Scale of the Law which provides the norm. Antinomianism which has been popularized by certain libertine Gurus has no place here. Men with all their limitation and imperfections can't claim to be infinitely beyond this world and thus beyond good and evil which we encounter at every stage of existence. Man must always separate divine viewpoint which is corollary of his incomparability from his own human, all-too-human viewpoint which is a corollary of divine similarity (Chittick, 2009: 292). Ibn Arabi would feel extreme discomfort with the moral chaos in the modern world where men have forgotten Law and their prerogative to assimilate divine traits and mostly fail to distinguish between base and noble traits. However all this should not be construed to imply that he countenances moralism which is typical modern heresy. The deadly criticism of Nietzsche on morality doesn't apply to his view of ethics. Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra Ibn Arabi's perfect man too is beyond good and evil. The perspective of Law is not the perspective of engendering command which precedes it and even in reality overcomes it. The perfect man has transcended the desiring self that seeks self gratification at the cost of the other. He is, by no means, immoral. Postmodern probematization of ethics and modern scientific discoveries implicating relativism of morals can't

problematize Akbarian position as he too, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, speaks from the high mountains of the Spirit which transcends all actions, good or evil. There is no such thing as virtue and sin (and thus moral evil) at the deepest level. Moral evil appears so from the perspective of law only which is not necessarily the same thing at the plane of *haqiqah*. God is beyond good and evil and so is the sage. Transcendence of good/evil dualism is a thesis shared by traditional mystical figures. Nietzsche's superman, as Coomaraswamy points out, exemplifies this mystical thesis rather than any heterodox conception. In fact modern relativism poses hardly a problem in Ibn 'Arabî's perspective and it is subsumed in the higher absolutist view of Sufism without denying its (relative) truth at a certain plane. In fact metaphysical-esoteric perspective of Ibn 'Arabî distinguishes itself from all kinds of moralisms and inadequate absolutisms (based on absolutizing something less than the Absolute) and ideologies to which modernity has succumbed.

In the chapter on ascension in *Futûbhât* Ibn Arabi quotes Yahya as saying that everyone travels on his own path on which he alone travels. So there is no scope for set recipes applicable for all the people. God is experienced differently by every person. This vetoes all fundamentalisms for good though this should not be interpreted as license to believe or do anything. In fact this problem of license and misuse is avoided in Ibn Arabi ethics as he formulates a set of advices distilled from scriptures and Sufi authorities which can be practiced by the pious alone. The central requirement is renunciation of self will or conquest of desiring self and with it pleasure/pain centric action. No selfish or hedonist person can afford to be a disciple of Ibn Arabi or a follower of Sufi path.

I quote some of his maxims which enshrine the true spirit in which dialogue with the other persons and collectivities should be held. These might appear almost superhuman for ordinary mortals like our party politicians. But the ideal set by the Shaykh, like the one set by Jesus when he said that one should offer another cheek, is based on the ontological considerations that all share one Self of God and it is in our real self interest to lose the self in humility, love, charity and compassion. These maxims align him with the great tradition of ethics in both Semitic and non-Semitic traditions. The following are from *The Mantle of Initiation*.

- Care nothing for the ignorance of him who does not know your worth; rather, it is not seemly that there be any sense of your worth even in your own eyes.
- Have no desire that people should listen to your speech.

- Be not anxious to give answer to anything displeasing said about you.
- Be content with [God's] Decree not necessarily with each thing decreed, but, rather, with its Decree itself. And receive with joy whatever may come from Him.
- Do favors for both friend and foe, treating all alike with humility, gentleness and long-suffering.
- Pardon the one who has harmed you, that is, do not even defend yourself [from harm].

The following passage sums up essential Ibn 'Arabî and the central message of *all* integral traditions as A. K. Coomaraswamy and other masters of traditions formulate it. Here is the basis for ethics on which all traditions are united i.e., transcendence of lower self to subsist in the divine self. Here is his formulation of the theory and objective of mystical discipline. Here is also a manifesto for coexistence of traditions or plurality of modes of experiencing or relating to the divine.

Now you must know that if a human being (*al-insân*) renounces their (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to their animal self (*nafs*) and instead prefers their Sustainer/Teacher (*rabb*), then the Real will give (that human being) a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of their carnal self... so that they walk in garments of Light. And (this form) is the *sharî'a* of their prophet and the Message of their messenger. Thus that (human being) receives from their Lord what contains their happiness – and some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state.

Ibn 'Arabî says in *The Kernel of the Kernel*: "You will be all when you make nothing of yourself." This is the golden rule that allows to know all truths and achieve all perfections and absolute certainty. Modern man, especially the academician, the philosopher of religion, the phenomenologist is more interested in speculation about Truth or God or phenomenological "objective" idle inquiry without being prepared to sell everything including the dearest self, as Jesus would say, or make nothing of himself for the sake of Truth. That explains why there is so much knowledge and so little wisdom today and why man is farther from God and nearer to dust. It is only by becoming nothing, by absolute detachment or poverty of spirit that one can attain the central point, the still centre of existence where lasting peace and felicity lie. The Friend doesn't tolerate duality as Ibn 'Arabî reminds us and comes to live in the sanctuary of a perfectly polished mirror of the heart.

Ibn ‘Arabî establishes a universal brotherhood based on the most fundamental ontological basis that all things, animate and inanimate are essentially Absolute or its countless faces. We love our neighbour or a tree because at the most fundamental plane we are our neighbour and we are the tree. There is no other in absolute sense. To see the other is to see duality rather than the One Essence. The Beloved smiles in every face and invites us for a meeting in every form. God is Love. As separate individualities we are not. The One is all. All are one. In his words “you are everything, in everything, and from everything.” So why assert our exclusive claim to be and why impose our desire on the other?

Everything is in communication with everything else. All things share in the life of God. Ibn ‘Arabî chooses – and asks us to choose – life over death, love over hate, mercy over wrath and thus dialogue over conflict. In this choice alone do we fulfill our vocation and will continue to live in an increasingly fragile world and deteriorating environment.

Metaphysics of Love

Self transcendence achieved through love is the crux of Akbarian vision as it is of the esoteric religion and wisdom traditions of the world. Love is the greatest unifying factor and metaphysics of love can’t be but most universal.

Sufi poets in general often choose to speak of Reality or Absolute in terms of Love. The Akbarian Sufi doctrine put in the language of love states that “there is but One Reality: Love or Sheer Being, which manifests Itself in two forms, the lover and the Beloved.” One quote from the *Futûbât* will suffice to show how great a lover he is. “By God, I feel so much love that it seems as though the skies would be rent asunder, the stars fall and the mountains move away if I burdened them with it: such is my experience of love “ For him love is the universal and unifying theme in his worldview. He wrote in the *Tanazzulât al-mawsiliyya*: “All praise to God who made love (*al-hawâ*) a sanctuary towards which the hearts of all men whose spiritual education is complete make their way and a *ka’ba* around which the secrets of the chests of men of spiritual refinement revolve.” For him the world of manifestation is nothing but the activity of love as God loved to be known or share his love (the Good tends to diffuse as Augustine puts it) and created the world, a mirror of His attributes. The world is the “other” to God so that he could see mirror Himself. In a way it is His object of love. The worlds are markers or traces of the incessant loving activity of God through unveiling by means of creation/ manifestation. Because the

different worlds or realms of manifestation are Divine Self-determinations they acquire a reflection of Divine Existence and this “reflection is the movement of life called love.” He says: “No existence-giver ever gives existence to anything until it loves giving it existence. Hence everything in *mujûd* is a beloved, so there are nothing but loved ones” (*Futûbât*, IV 424). Ibn ‘Arabî is not the one who could countenance dualism of body and soul and saw the body as the vehicle of spirit and thus essentially divine. Even desire and passion are not as such distractions but divine in their roots.

As opposed to every romantic and dualistic understanding of love, he envisions love as lying at the centre of reality as is the case in Plato, world mystical traditions and in fact in all religions. Love and self-denial go hand in hand. Self transcendence achieved through love is the crux of Akbarian vision as it is of the esoteric religion and wisdom traditions of the world. If God is Love and man consciously or unconsciously and every creature is incessantly driven by love we have the most comprehensive and solid foundation for dialogue. Love as the essence of everything implies all grounds for conflict are context bound and contingent. Dialogue with the other is ideally achieved when there remains neither the self nor the other but only Love. Jane Clark sums it so well.

Ibn ‘Arabî points out that the deepest understanding is not just to know intellectually that Divine Love is the beginning, the motive power and the end of everything in creation: it is to discover through our own lives and experiences – through our own “taste” – that everything that happens to us is, essentially, a manifestation of God’s love for us, and that our return to Him is equally motivated by love – not by fear (Clark, 2005).

The Muhammedan Saint as the Ideal Interlocutor

Ibn ‘Arabî gives the most universal definition of Muhammedan where this becomes

not a designation of a particular historical community but the very name of universality and perfection. It is the name of a station, theoretically available to everyone, attainable to the select few who travel on and on, perfectly realizing all stations until he arrives at the station of no station in which one has nothing of one’s own and therefore mirrors the Real most perfectly and is not defined by any particular divine name or attribute but brings together all standpoints or stations (Twinch 2004).

A Muhammedan saint, as Ibn Arabi conceives him, is the ideal interlocutor. He has nothing to lose and nothing to win as he has transcended the fog of passions and the distorting veil of desires and become a mirror in which the Truth or God sees itself. He shows mirror to everything. By appropriating all the divine names and becoming pure servant in whom not a trace of Lordship remains he

represents the rights of all existents. Representing the rights of the other, the non-self, the Universal Will or Tao he will best represent the case of Nature in the world facing environmental crisis. He has nothing personal impose on the other. He is not attached to any view whatsoever but sees things as they are and gives each created thing exactly what is due to it on the basis of seeing it as a unique self-disclosure (*tajallî*) of the absolute *Haqq*. Seeing the oneness of the Real and the manyness of creation allows them “to give each thing that has a *haqq* its *haqq*,” as demanded by the Prophet (Chittick 1998). For him a Muhammedan is one who realizes the perfections of all the prophets – an ideal worthy of emulating for every man and who can assert that he is truly a Muhammedan and who can be more inclusivist than a Muhammedan in this sense? He demands, as Qunawi puts it, that one should perceive each thing only through that thing itself and inasmuch as one is identical with each thing and thus one is the attribute of every attribute and the quality of every essence and one’s act is the act of every actor (*Nafahat*, 265). The highest station of no-station demands disengaging oneself from all qualities, bonds, limitations, and constrictions and standing naked before Non-delimited *Wujūd* i.e., to be absolutely open to the Real with no imposition or will of one’s own. It is what Jesus calls the poverty of spirit and other scriptures such as the Bhagwat Gita detachment. His vision of the unity of Being demands transcendence or cessation of all inequalities and distinctions of class, creed, colour, race, gender, nationality, regionality etc. He demands the sacrifice of the ego which thinks in terms of its rights over and against the rights of the other. “I” must be annihilated in fana so that one mirrors Existence or God and flows with the Tao. Ibn ‘Arabî thus demands nothing less than Universal Compassion and encountering the other with infinite humility and care – an ideal which Levinas attempts to appropriate.

Foregrounding supraformal, supraindividual, metaphysical and esoteric instead of the limiting rationalist and divisive exoteric theological which is anthropomorphic, individual, formal and sentiment affected Ibn Arabi puts in perspective conflicting schools of thought. It is love/knowledge/reality/mercycentric which are all integrating or universalizing entities.

Diversity of Interpretations

Dialogue is best possible when we listen to every point of view and disallow epistemic chauvinism. When all readings possibly supported by the text are in principle allowed we have a manifesto

for freedom of thought. However our Shaykh will not allow what today passes for unrestrained freedom of thought. For the Shaykh the text can't be written off or crossed unlike the approach of extremist Derrideans. Modern penchant for dozens of "isms" that result from this pseudofreedom to proceed without restraint, to make a god of thinking or merely human faculty of mind is itself a problem that we must guard against. Ibn 'Arabî says that there is not one intention of God that we need to get to. There is not one determinate meaning only. He opens up the space for potentially infinite meanings – every new reading should disclose new meanings of the sacred text according to him. He says that the author of the Quran intends every meaning understood by every reader, and he reminds us that human authors cannot have the same intention. Meaning closure that postmodernists are very much concerned about never happens in his view. The real meaning is with God but all meanings participate in that divine meaning. All things speak of the Beloved and are portals to the Infinite. Polysemy for him results not from infinity of contexts but because of multiplicity of souls or addresses. All this implies that fundamentalism and theological imperialism have no warrant.

Meanings in the three books – the book of verses, the book of universe, the book of the soul – are never repeated according to him. He accordingly tells us that if someone re-reads a Quranic verse and sees exactly the same meaning that he saw the previous time, he has not read it "properly" – that is, in keeping with the *haqq* of the divine speech (Chittick, 2008). We may note that polysemy results not from infinity of contexts but because of multiplicity of souls or addresses. However, we can't be allowed the typical irresponsible Derridean play with the text where one makes it a point to misread, to deconstruct, to question, to hunt for the gaps. Ibn 'Arabî affirms multiplicity of meaning rather than no given or potential meaning to be laboriously, in all humility searched, a process which may require moral qualification also of which it is absurd to talk in the Derridean context. However there are convergences between the two approaches. There is no such thing as unique meaning or final interpretation or the only true interpretation for both Ibn 'Arabî and Derrida. Ibn 'Arabî's Quran is an open intertext that contains layers upon layers of hidden meanings. Nothing can be a better antidote to theological imperialism.

It means no complacency can be entertained. We must be ever humble at the door of the King and humility is the prerequisite of real dialogue. The unbelievers lack this virtue as they complacently dismiss claims that anyone else is given access to the Truth. Humility

comes from being nothing and waiting for God to teach. Modern skeptic is neither able to consent to be nothing nor acknowledge any Knower or Teacher.

Ibn Arabi says something about hermeneutic method that is incomprehensible to moderns. He maintains that the act of interpretation involves self sacrifice or self transcendence and carrying out the wishes of God as a servant. The real hermeneutics does not depend upon the knowledge of the interpreter, but upon his “unletteredness” (*ummiyya*) and receptivity to Divine instruction. He says of the man who truly recites the Qur’ān that God instructs and he listens passively as he suspends all his personal reason and reflection (Chodkiewicz, 2005:27).

Divine Names and Roots of Diversity of Beliefs

Approaching from the gnostic rather than the voluntaristic perspective the Akbarian “mysticism of infinity” shows how in our denial of truth we nonetheless affirm it – a curved path too is a straight path (more precisely we don’t need to travel at all on any path, to think of taking the straight path is to wrongly imagine a distance between the Real and its “children” which we are) – we are always equally close/distant from the center called God/Reality. All things are on the straight path even if it deviates for, as Ibn ‘Arabī says in the *Futūbāt*: “... curvature is straight in reality, like the curvature of a bow since the straightness which is desired from it is curvature ... and all movement and rest in existence is divine because it is in the hand of the Real” (*Futūbāt* II, 563). This is a vision of spiritual democracy too profound to be assimilated for even the most catholic and tolerant of theologies. His ingenious reinterpretation of key terms of exclusion such as *kaafir*, *fajir*, *zalim* shows his catholicity. Even Iblis is ultimately no outsider. How can there be any exclusion or marginalization in a perspective of complete nondualism? Adopting basically metaphysical instead of religious perspective allows him to transcend dogmatic exclusivism that has traditionally been associated with religious perspective and in fact all exclusivism based on anything less than the Absolute and there is nothing which is Absolute. With him the question is of man and his happiness or felicity and traditional religion, if properly read, is a means to that end rather than an end in itself in the name of which men could be divided or killed. His concerns are basically existential and thus universal to which everyone could relate. He submits to Truth only (that is his definition of a Muslim) and Truth is his only God, much in the manner of Gandhi who emphasized the Vedantic equation of *Sat* with Brahman. He finds Truth/ Reality of

the substance of Joy and one with man and that is the good news he brings to the despairing nihilistic world. He has ultimately no dogmas to preach except openness to the reality without any imposition from conjectural self or mind. He brings the glad tidings that the world is indeed our home or we are the world and we are loved and Love is the be all and end all of all existence, all endeavors. The Real is, it can't and needn't be found or searched – rather it finds us. Wherever one turns there is the face of God as the Quran puts it and Ibn 'Arabî reiterates time and again. Realizing this one becomes a flute and God the flute player. A love affair with the Real commences and one enjoys orgasm with the whole universe. This overwhelming desire for love can't stop at any human substitute as the *Tarjuman* narrates.

Ibn Arabi doesn't place misguidance at the same plane as guidance even if both of them are effects of divine names. He weighs everything in the scale of law – a procedure secular modernity would vehemently reject. Although everything is a “face” (*wajh*) of God—”Wherever you turn, there is God's face” (Quran, 2:115) — we need to make distinctions among the omnipresent faces to account for the mutiplicity around. Everything is ultimately an effect of one of the infinite specific divine names. We can't write off distinctions and refuse to recognize distinct *haqqs* of everything. All perspectives are valid but all of them don't lead to felicity. All of them are not straight for man though they are so for God. A plethora of perspectives are all valid due to the very nature of Absolute which is infinitely rich and the essence of everything and the object of every conception and perception but man needs to face the right face, the face of beauty and not of majesty. Man can ill afford distance. He is made for love and love leads him to proximity of God. Outside God there is no felicity, no bliss. Modern man is self exiled to hell where he imagines to hide from God. But this is impossible as is evidenced from the painful tone of modern literature. Lost in fragmentary images that modern art form depict modern man is still, badly and painfully, in search of his soul.

Ibn 'Arabî 's perfect man is open to all forms, to infinite disclosures of God which change every instant. He lives moment to moment as he is *abdul waqt*, the servant of the Instant. For him, as for Zen, ultimately, there is no distinction between the immediate and the ultimate and there is no goal as such, each step is the goal, each moment is the goal. A blade of grass is inwardly the Absolute. There is no particular or exclusive way to salvation because all ways are already blessed. There is no need of salvation because all alienation or bondage is really illusory. All are saved; all are embraced

by God because none has ever left God or the Garden of Eden except in his imagination. And it is that cursed mind and imagination which is the bane of man. God is loving enough (*Wadud*) and strong enough to overcome all resistance on the part of man and willy nilly arranges his return to Himself. If everything is in way perfectly as it should be what point is in sending prophets and exhorting people to truth? Ibn ‘Arabî ‘s commentator and author of *Bursevi Fusūs* answers the question thus: “This one cannot say, because this invitation is the invitation from the Name Misleader (*mudill*) to the Name Guide (*bādî*) to Truth, and the invitation from the Name Compeller (*jabbār*) to the Name Just (*‘adl*).” We can add that it is, in general, an invitation from the Names of Majesty to the Names of Beauty, from what necessitates suffering on a human plane to that which engenders peace and bliss. We need to invoke the Names of Beauty to be relieved of the effect of the Names of Majesty. To Ibn ‘Arabî are credited, like Sankara, great devotional hymns and invocations or prayers. For Ibn ‘Arabî the great samsaric drama has a climax in universal salvation as Mercy overcomes all resistance in the end. Because Divine Mercy has precedence over wrath hell too becomes sweet or enjoyable after some time. Evil is noughted as it has always been parasitic on good possessing no real existence. The Goodness of God has the final word.

From Ibn Arabî’s understanding of divine names it follows that we should not expect to see manifestation of only selected divine names. The theatre of the universe can’t go on if effects of the names of severity – distance, strife, conflict, disequilibrium – are absent. Men have differed and will continue to differ until all veils are torn asunder when the reality of differences in beliefs shall become known. Differences will never be fully obliterated and pain and conflict or disequilibrium never cease to characterize our state in the world which is by definition a state of disequilibrium because of our ontological distance or difference from the Principle which alone is Good. The world is not God or it will cease to be what it is. We must remember the somber point which Ibn Arabî emphasizes that the Absolute is beyond good and evil. Everything is an expression of this universal and primordial Principle. There is nothing ugly and discordant in the play of God from the gnostic’s perspective because he doesn’t evaluate existence in terms of any binary opposition such as of pleasure and pain and even ugly and beautiful or good and evil as usually understood. Certain types of sufferings are unavoidable as long as there are sentient creatures caught in the vortex of space and time. It is humanism and not religion which has denied the reality of man’s fallen nature or sin and believed in man’s perfectibility, a

heaven on this earth and man usurping Godhead and forgetting his vicegerancy. Man is made not only of the noblest stuff as he is created in the image of God but also of the vilest of clay. The human constitution contains a natural tendency to wrong doing (Quran, 12:35). Wrongdoing or moral evil thus can't be wished away. Moral evil is not unconnected with intellectual misjudgment or error. Men shall, therefore, be eternally busy to clear the obstacles of misunderstanding, myopia, hamartia and move forward towards creating a more tolerant and pluralist society. Ibn Arabi's importance lies in offering valuable insight into grounds of human conflict and its role in divine economy. Imperfect individuals given to haste, forgetfulness and heedlessness as the Quran characterizes them need to be ever in the process of dialogue in order to reduce impact of centrifugal forces.

The lover of the Real sees neither sin nor guilt, neither distance or real alienation from the Real nor damnation for those who have gone astray – in fact there is no going astray ultimately, no slackening of God's control. Nothing needs to be done to reach God, just awakening from the sleep of inattention or heedlessness. The world is the playground of God's attributes and it is human, all-too-human weakness to evaluate in anthropocentric and moral terms. The attributes of majesty are not to be loathed at. Iblis is a friend in disguise as for Hallaj and the leader of the lovers as for Rumi. For Ibn 'Arabî God's trickery (*makr*) is educative. What we ordinarily call evil and sin is not so at root or in the larger framework of divinely willed action. The sage is situated beyond good and evil. But all this doesn't mean he makes a joke of traditional eschatology and commandments and is blind to the painful reality of suffering here and hereafter. Though *kafir* may not be pejorative term for him in one sense his position remains traditional one which sees them as deluded, ignorant folk who cover up truth and are heedless of their own souls. Modern unbelieving world will thus come under a serious condemnation from him. Modern secular man doesn't know what it means to be human as he is ignorant of God or what it means not to be concerned with our theomorphic nature and this also explains his incomprehension regarding need or role of hell. Ibn Arabi's genius lies in respecting the traditional understanding of religious doctrines which make religion a serious thing, a matter of life and death but at the same time pleading for a deeper understanding at the plane of *haqiqah* where theological or religious notions get a metaphysical translation and become quite comprehensible.

All exclusivist ideologies are ultimately blind to all comprehensiveness of the Name Allah which the perfect man

represents/appropriates and worship particular names only (postmodernism, for instance, seems to be under the Name *Al-Mudbil*). Ibn ‘Arabî invites the world torn by ideological conflicts and religious exclusivism to the Muhammedan station of no-station where no particular name/belief/form is absolutized. The only exclusivity or hierarchy that he recognizes is the Quranic one of those who know and those who are ignorant and asks God refuge from being amongst the latter. This is absolutely warranted distinction from the human viewpoint as on it hinges felicity. Man can’t afford worshipping *Al-Mudbil* or *Az-Zar* (Who inflicts loss). Piety or righteousness follows from knowledge. Indeed *avidya* is the sin in all traditions and it is in knowledge that lasting peace and blessedness lies. Suffering is consequence of *avidya*. Perversion of will or moral sin too follows ignorance. No man is willfully bad, says Socrates. So sinners are not to be hated but pitied and given eyes to see. This is the task Ibn ‘Arabî proposes himself as a teacher, as a counselor to the people. He doesn’t make a joke of religion and its threat of hell in the name of Unitarianism and vastness of Mercy. That there is *dukkha* in the world, that people are terribly ignorant of the joy and peace that God is, none can dispute. We need the religion’s glad tidings that Reality/ Truth is one with us and thus sorrow can be conquered and ignorance or alienation can be overcome. The wisdom of the prophets is not dispensable as long as man is man and seeks joy, love and peace. What is God but Beauty and Truth (for both Plato and Ibn ‘Arabî as in fact for all traditions) and who doesn’t worship them? God is also Bliss (*Ananda*). Life seeks joy and that is the meaning of life. No absurdist can deny this. Yes Mercy encompasses all things. One can easily understand the Akbarian perception of the universality of worship. The quotation with which this paper begins also becomes comprehensible. The very choice to be is a mode of worship – for thereby we choose life and Mercy as Ibn ‘Arabî understand it and God is Life and Mercy.

Qunawi, the great disciple and commentator of Ibn Arabi, reads the notion of All- Comprehensiveness of the Names as implying that God is “well-pleased” with all things, even those that are “astray” from the point of view of the commandments of religion, since they are only displaying the properties of His Names. Ibn ‘Arabî often translates misguidance as perplexity and his defence of Noah’s community in *Fusus* is one of the most original things in the history of Muslim thought though most shocking to theologians and few Unitarians or nondualists could wholeheartedly join their hands with him on this issue. In the poem at the beginning of the chapter on Hūd in the *Fusus al-Hikam* Ibn ‘Arabî writes:

The Straight Path belongs to God (*Allāh*). It is manifest in all, not hidden. He is present in the small and the great, In those who are ignorant of how things are and those who know. Because of this His mercy encompasses everything, No matter how base or magnificent.

He reads pejoratively treated notions of getting astray or misguidance in more positive light as perplexity in his most famous commentary on the wisdom of Noah. For him *kafiruun* are the highest saints who conceal their station by inviting blame (*malamatiya*). His *Fusūs* has ever been targeted for such assertions. If everything is decreed and nothing goes against divine will and God is in full control every moment and guides everything perfectly as the Quran affirms and Muslim creed states, a sort of Hegelian thesis of rationality of the real gets vindicated though we must note that Ibn ‘Arabî, like the sacred texts, never tires of emphasizing the need of discernment and action and responsibility and ever fighting evil with all one’s resources. There is no contradiction between these two views as the later too is ultimately part of the divine programme as clearly formulated in scriptures which stress *sha’ria* as well as *haqiqah*. Ibn ‘Arabî’s position can be better appreciated if we keep in mind that for numerous Sufis there is no real contradiction between the perspectives of gnosis (*haqiqah* in Sufi terminology) and *sha’ria*.

Unitarianism and Universalism

If indeed the inner core of our Era is a movement of Love and Beauty as Peter Coates says we can proceed ahead for making these names/values the central features of our lives, both individually and collectively. This will be the greatest contribution of Ibn Arabi and his admirers to self-other dialogue which is the foundation or basis of all dialogues. Attracted to Beauty that God is the lovers shall celebrate every moment of their eternal journey that we call life and there shall scholars. I believe that all well meaning persons from diverse ideological backgrounds – even Iblis is ultimately under God’s control and is thus His agent in consistent Unitarian world-view, a Sufi story to the effect that God whispered into his ear not to prostrate as otherwise the whole drama that this universe is will not be possible – will and in fact are contributing to this enormously complex dialogue process. The last words must be for the Seal of Universal Sainthood Jesus who said ‘Judge not.’ A thoroughly decreed person such as Ibn Arabi doesn’t judge anyone but shows everyone the mirror and help them in seeing and judging themselves in the right perspective, in the perspective of Absolute.

Dialogue is possible when the heart or imagination instead of the head takes the reign. Thought must be transcended to commune with the other, the Reality (*Al-Haqq*) because conceptual intellect

divides and posits dualism of subject and object. The ego which divides part from the whole, man from Existence or Divine Environment must be annihilated in *fana*. Hell as retreat into the cocoon of individuality that accepts separation from the Real because of inability to love. Thus hell is refusal to open for dialogue – which might include total transformation of the self and taking divine robes. Since the world and the divine are everywhere in contact there is no problem of geographic displacement – and thus the whole discourse of identity politics, of exile and nostalgia for homeland and endless clashes over borders and visas – in Ibn Arabi. There is no space for usury and corporate capitalism and thus for wars occasioned by greed of wealth. The problems – political, social, economic – over which modern world is in perpetual conflict arise from the wrong view of self and our vacation in the world. Ibn Arabi would approach all of them by first targeting the view of the self vis-a-vis the other/God. Right view is the first step towards conquest of suffering or conflict. Modern world has got fundamentally wrong view of almost everything vitally important for life and peace. It is naïve to expect that fruitful dialogue process between traditions, nations, identities, ideologies can go on our world without drastic reconstruction of fundamental premises of modern world-view. Ibn Arabi would demand nothing short of this – taking loathing of the self and thus rejection of the received definition of man as *Homo economicus*. Ibn Arabi had strongly rejected the political authorities for their vices which nowadays have grown more rampant and almost into a norm for modern power seekers. As long as the political and civil administration is tied to the interests of economic institutions such as big corporations and banks it is difficult to talk about Ibn Arabi's message of universal love, compassion and understanding. When it pays to create conflicts and misunderstanding and there are big mafias that sponsor them one wonders how much space is there for prophets of love. Will Ibn Arabi be heard when the roots of conflict are primarily economic? Yes – though on a limited scale by isolated individuals – as he targets the self that seeks riches which he sees as pursuing illusion. For him all evils are ultimately traceable to ignorance which is curable. No man is willfully bad as Socrates said. Man being created in divine image is fundamentally good and is being guided to felicity.

Some Possible Criticisms

Some serious questions may arise here. If it is all really a play of divine names including the worst misunderstandings and conflicts how can dialogue succeed or really matter? The answer is that Divine Mercy and thus the names of Beauty have priority and as humans we

must strive to move from being under the influence of the names of Majesty. We are condemned, so to speak, to choose love over hate and peace over conflict. Another question is if all things are happening as per archetypal preparedness and thus perfectly in way what becomes of conscious efforts to create space for dialogue and tolerance? The answer that Ibn Arabi would give is that our effort itself is ultimately a divine act as God is the only Agent or Actor. Conscious effort to change is not outside the comprehensive meaning of destiny. We are destined to eternal felicity. Mercy is destined to prevail upon forces of hate and disunity. We are well advised by *sha'ria* to be willing agents of this predestined plan. Another problem is the view that this historical era is the era of progressive decay, the era of scandals and doesn't it mean certain pessimism regarding all efforts made for change towards the better or the efforts for dialogue. The answer is that this era is also progressing towards the time of Jesus when the religion of truth and peace shall be established. And another point is that if everything is providentially designed the enormous space for intercultural dialogue created due to shrinking of geographical boundaries and diffusion of information regarding other cultures and traditions is also providence. Proliferation of social and political movements that seek to further the dialogue process at various levels are thus manifestation of Mercy which providence is actualizing. Ibn Arabi gives us additional reasons to believe why we must strive to fight against obstructions to Divine Love and Beauty and Mercy. He assures us that man shall overcome someday and to eternal peace and felicity all are driven.

Conclusion

Acknowledgment fundamental mystery and unity of existence in Ibn Arabi amounts to possibility of dialogue with the other that transcends our comprehension and granting that it can be accessed/known or spoken to, in a way, means that we can have a dialogue with everything that exists beyond the narrow cocoon of our self. As all creatures are alive and rational and praising God man is not condemned to the hell of closed subjectivity in a gratuitous and indifferent universe. The stars are not silent. In fact there exists none other than the Self which is in all as the essence of all. Man's call to the Lord doesn't go unheard and the Creator itself is in need of continuous manifestation or dialogue with the created. From Ibn Arabi's viewpoint, the challenge for each new generation is to see new meaning of revelation. It is to see God in the new form of revelation that each era brings in the form of new social structures, art forms, scientific discoveries. Seeing God with one eye and the

phenomena with the other eye is a continuous challenge and if man succeeds in this endeavour he can carry out all dialogues on all levels as in every thing or event there is to be discerned God's *haqq*. (Saints see God's severe face in the taunt of their enemy and take it with smile fresh world). Dialogue demands self giving and humility. This is an act of sacrifice which most people today are not willing to make. We need to carry out dialogues ceaselessly as we experience new revelations which bring with them new challenges and demand new understanding. Whether men know it or not dialogue is going on despite our reluctance. Everything is in the process of continuous change. Life being He/not-He is dialogic, dialectical play of binaries, of God and the inexistent world or transcendent divinity and the world of forms. Life is a dialogue.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ In the perennialist perspective metaphysic constitutes an intuitive, or in other words immediate knowledge, as opposed to the discursive or mediate knowledge which belongs to the rational order. (Most protagonists as well as critics of concept of religious experience hardly leave this rational order in their discourse. "Intellectual intuition is even more immediate than sensory intuition, being beyond the distinction between subject and object which the latter allows to subsist." (Qaisar, 2002: 168) Subject and object are here identified competently and this complete identification is not an attribute of any inferior or non-metaphysical type of knowledge. A consequence of this is that knowing and being are fundamentally one or two inseparable aspects of a single reality. Knowing and being are indistinguishable in the sphere where all is "without duality" (Qaisar, 2002: 169.) From such a perspective the various "theories of knowledge" with metaphysical pretensions which occupy such an important place in modern Western philosophy (which dominate everything in case of Kant) are purposeless. The debate over cognitivity of religious experience similarly appears purposeless in the metaphysical perspective. As Guenon says such theories arise from an attitude of mind that originated in the Cartesian dualism and is shared by almost all modern philosophers. This attitude consists in artificially opposing knowing and being. This is antithesis of true metaphysic. The identity of knowing and being is not merely dogmatically affirmed but realized as well in the integral metaphysic. (Ibid., p.170)

The theory and meditational and other practices are a means or aids to such a realization. It need not and could not be certified or verified by other means, other persons or any kind of tests. Of course these considerations appear strange to Western people. Mystical realization is only partial and rather distant approximation or analogy of metaphysical realization (Qaisar, 2002: 172).

The very fact that such realization is of a purely religious character shows that it is confined entirely to the individual domain; mystical states are in no sense

supraindividual, since they only imply a more or less indefinite extension of purely individual possibilities. Realization of this kind cannot have a universal or metaphysical bearing, and it always remains subject to the influence of individual elements, chiefly of a sentimental order. This realization is also always fragmentary and rarely controlled and doesn't presuppose any theoretical preparation (Qaisar, 2002: 173). Metaphysical realization is common to all Oriental thought and "mysticism."

² The traditionalist perennialist perspective began to be enunciated in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century by the French metaphysician Rene Guenon, although its precepts are considered to be timeless and to be found in all authentic traditions. It is also known as Perennialism, the Perennial Philosophy, or *Sophia Perennis*, or *Religio Perennis* or sometimes simply referred to as the traditionalist or metaphysical school. The term *Philosophia Perennis* goes back to the Renaissance, while the Hindu expression *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Doctrine – and the Islamic expression the *jawidani kbird* or *al-bikmat al-khalidah* has precisely the same signification. The other important figures of the Traditionalist School were the German Sufi-metaphysician Frithjof Schuon and the Ceylonese art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy. *Philosophia perennis* pertains to a knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles. This knowledge which is available to the intellect (which in the traditionalist perspective is a supra-individual faculty distinct from reason though the latter is its reflection on the mental plane) is, moreover, contained in the heart of all religions or traditions. At the heart of the *philosophia perennis* "lies pure metaphysics, if this later term is understood as the science of Ultimate Reality, as a *scientia sacra* not to be confused with the subject bearing the name metaphysics in post-medieval Western philosophy" (Nasr, 1993: 54). Revelation and intellection are the twin sources of metaphysical knowledge. Traditional metaphysics finds its fullest expression in the Hindu doctrines. The phenomena of religion, theology and mysticism is a falling from the intellectual purity of the doctrine, though religion has also been seen as an existential formulation of metaphysics rather than falling away from it.

³ Understanding the notion of metaphysical realization is central to the debate on religious experience from the Eastern and Sufi "mystical" or metaphysical perspective. A few remarks are in order in this connection. In the act of metaphysical realization individual domain is altogether left out. There is no room for feeling and sentimentalism. The mind or everything that contributes to a separative distinctive selfhood or subjecthood has to be transcended completely in order to experience the divine in the fullest sense of the term in the Eastern context. In fact as Guenon has provocatively remarked there is no such thing as mysticism (and religious experience in the modern sense of the term in the East. Here we must point out, from the perennialist (more precisely the Guenonian reading of it) point of view the difference between religion and metaphysics. As Guenon points out the metaphysical point of view is purely intellectual while as in the religious or theological point of view the presence of a sentimental element affects the doctrine itself, which doesn't allow of its complete objectivity. The emotional element nowhere plays a bigger part than in the "mystical" form of religious thought. Contrary to the prevalent opinion he declares that mysticism, from the very fact that it is inconceivable apart from the religious point of view, is quite unknown in the East (Guenon, 2000: 124). The influence of sentimental element obviously impairs the intellectual purity of the doctrine. This falling away

from the standpoint of metaphysical thought occurred generally and extensively in the Western world because there feeling was stronger than intelligence and this has reached its climax in modern times (Guenon, 2000: 125). Modern theistic appropriations of mystical experience by choosing to remain at the level of theology and not cognizing the metaphysical point of view (that brilliantly and convincingly appropriates such apparently divergent varieties of mystical and metaphysical realization as that of Buddhism and Christianity) cannot claim total truth as theology itself cannot do so. And it is not always possible to fully translate metaphysical doctrines in terms of theological dogmas. Only one example will suffice here. The immediate metaphysical truth “Being exists” gives rise to another proposition when expressed in the religious or theological mode “God exists.” But as Guenon says the two statements would not be strictly equivalent except on the double condition of conceiving God as Universal Being, which is far from always being the case in fact (Tillich comes close to holding this view of God), and of identifying existence with pure Being or what the Sufis call *Zat* or Essence which is metaphysically inexact. The endless controversies connected with the famous ontological argument are a product of misunderstanding of the implications of the two formulae just cited. It is the inadequate or faulty metaphysical background that contributes a lot to controversies on either side of the debate on religious experience in modern discourses of philosophy of religion. Unlike purely metaphysical conceptions theological conceptions are not beyond the reach of individual variations. Those who discuss such matters as the “proofs of God’s existence,” should first of all make sure that in using the same word “God” they really are intending to express an identical conception. However this is hardly the case usually and we see altogether different languages being used. Antimetaphysical anthropomorphism comes to the fore in this realm of individual variations. (Guenon, 2000: 128-29)

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CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN
AUSTRIA AND SOUTH ASIAN
SUBCONTINENT WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO IQBAL

Muhammad Ikram Chughtai

ABSTRACT

The extensive and deep rooted interactions between Austria and Turkey can still easily be traced in the family and place names, mostly familiar in present day Austria, and also in some of the dialects of the federal provinces like Steirmask and Kainten in which numerous loan- words of the Turkish origin are used. In the comity of world nations, Austria is the third major European power to develop relations with Muslims and it came into contact with the Islamic world through the Ottoman Empire that was knocking the doors of the Eastern Europe in the fourteenth century. After the conquest of Constantinople (1453), the Turks undertook frequent expeditions which took them further and further to the west and thus became a permanent threat to the Hapsburg patrimonial lands. Twice the Ottoman arises reached the gates of Vienna (1529 and 1683) and their proximity affected the development of the knowledge of Muslim society and Islam in Europe. This political expansion led to a new subject of study Islam in its Ottoman context, and Islam being now largely identified with the Turks and their rule.

Centuries ago, a commercial contact with India was carried on by Europeans through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and consequently they had to pass through a long tract of countries to Asia. But the discovery of a maritime passage to India facilitated, in a great measure, their commercial connections. First, the Portuguese obtained a firm footing in India but they were encroached on by other European states, particularly by the Dutch. The immense profit reaped by these states encouraged also the English and the French to open a commercial link with India. As the Mughals control over Delhi waned, these European merchants, striving for the political hegemony fought prolonged wars and finally the military, political and economic balance of power shifted in favor of the British.

In this arena of warring European nations, Austria stood aloof, as it had no expansionistic designs. Instead, it took another root and that was primarily aimed at capturing the mind and soul of the people, rather than to yoke them politically.

In the comity of world nations, Austria is the third major European power to develop relations with Muslims and it came into contact with the Islamic world through the Ottoman Empire that was knocking the doors of the Eastern Europe in the fourteenth century. After the conquest of Constantinople (1453), the Turks undertook frequent expeditions which took them further and further to the west and thus became a permanent threat to the Hapsburg patrimonial lands. Twice the Ottoman armies reached the gates of Vienna (1529 and 1683) and their proximity affected the development of the knowledge of Muslim society and Islam in Europe. This political expansion led to a new subject of study Islam in its Ottoman context, and Islam being now largely identified with the Turks and their rule.

These extensive and deep-rooted interactions between Austria and Turkey can still easily be traced in the family and place names, mostly familiar in present-day Austria, and also in some of the dialects of the federal provinces like Steiermark and Kärnten in which numerous loan-words of the Turkish origin are used.

A part from Turkey, Austria did not have such close relationship with other Muslim countries, particularly with the South-Asian

Subcontinent, as it was not colonial power. Here, the Austrians preferred to have a propound contact as scholars, orientalists, scientists, travelers and missionaries who made a substantial contribution to the study of Muslim India.

With reference to the Subcontinent, the name of Joseph Tieffenthaler, a Jerit missionary from South Tyrol, can be mentioned as one of the early Austrians who came to India in 1740 and lived there until his death in Lucknow in 1785. He extensively traveled to the remote parts of India and was an extraordinary expert of the Indian Literature, languages, geography and natural history. He is commonly called the “Father of the modern India Geography” and his ofrus magnum “Beschreibung von Hindustan”/ provides a vivid and original geographical, historical and linguistic description, based on his own experiences and in– depth observations. The voluminous book was published from Berlin in 1785 and almost simultaneously translated into French by the quetil due Peron from Paris.

Johann Martin Honigberger, an Austrian pharmacist, reached Lhore in 1828 and served there as a physician at the court of Sikh ruler, Maharajah Ranjit Singh. He practiced medicine in Lahore for about twenty years and then returned to his country in 1850, where he died in his native town Kronstadt in 1869.

His most interesting and entertaining book under the title *Frichte and dem Morgenlande*, he vividly described his adventures from the time he left Austria, as well as varied life– styles in the countries he visited, but especially at the court of Ranjit Singh. A major part of this book deals exclusively with his medical experiences and reports of different cures he attempted with the people, containing western medicine with what he had observed in the oriental countries.

Carl Alexander Auselm Freihar Von Higel (1795 -1870), a wealthy Austrian diplomate and officer, traveled in far– fetched Indian regions, especially in Kashmir and Punjab. He was a diligent and faithful observer of nature. His voluminous illustrated work is entitled *Kashchmir and das Reich der Siek* (4 vols., Sffuffgart 1840 - 42, also available in abridged English translation) contains a peculiar account of the ancient and modern history of Kashmir, with sundry miscellaneous particulars, both geographical and physical, also adding useful information about the products, resources and inhabitants of the mountain regions. Von Higel entered Lahore on 11th January 1936 and after a sojourn of ten days proceeded to Delhi. In Lahore, he was welcomed by Ranjit Singh, who died a year later. He was very much impressed by the architectural grandeur and beauty of some historical monuments like Jahangir’s Tomb and Shalamar Gardens- two splendid edifices of the Mughal period.

Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840 – 1899), a reputed scholar, linguist, educationist, explorer and ethnologist, was also an Austrian as he himself declared in his certificate of Naturalization of 1892, now housed in the National Archives of England. Brought-up and educated in the Muslim environment in Istanbul, his profound studies of Islamic beliefs and practices are replete with his personal experiences. He came to Lahore in early 1860 and soon became a central figure in educational and language reform in the Punjab. In those days, Lahore overtook Delhi as the centre of educational learning and literary culture after 1857. As a founding member of the Punjab University and the first principal of the Government College, Lahore, he gained considerable influence in disseminating education among the masses. He used his position as an Islamicist, researcher and educator to work with the colonial officials, the local elite and the literati: most of Leitner's compatriots have concentrated more on his ethnological, anthropological and linguistic researches on the areas lying between Kashmir and Afghanistan, a named by him Dardistan, but a comprehensive study of his life and educational reforms are still waiting for a denoted scholar.

In Austria, a specific kind of initiative was taken to differ knowledge about Muslim history and culture. Joseph Van Hammer-Purgstall (d.1856), “father” of Austria orientation, played a pioneering role in establishing the scholarly study of major Islamic languages and literatures, not only in his own country but also in other neighboring German-speaking regions. No doubt, he has been called, with great reason, “der grosse Anteger”.

Hammer-Purgstall was an enormously prolific scholar who wrote on a wide variety of subjects concerning the Islamic world and it would be difficult here to speak in comprehensive details of his oeuvre. From his huge corpus of books (76) and articles one can hardly find sufficient material relating to India in general and to Muslim India in Particular. His seven years stay in the East (1799-1806) did not bring him further afield than Turkey and Egypt. Even in ten occidental and oriental languages of the inscription on his grave in Weidling, no Indian language is included. However, it is evident from fame of his writings that he was fully aware and well conversant with the literary and cultural achievements of Indian Muslims and had personal relations with scholars, residing in India, and the learned institutions functioning in the different parts of India. Though Hammer's contribution to Muslim India is comparatively meager it deserves a special attention. Here a few aspects of his intellectual links with Muslim India are briefly touched upon.

Hammer's German translation of *Divan-i-Hafiz*, a work after spoken of disparagingly, inspired Goethe to write his "Weststchfer Diram" which is turn, was to inspire Iqbal is third passion poetic collection "Payam-i-Mashriq" (Botschaft des Ostens) as a response to Geothe's 'Divan' and headed the "Fundgraben-Mutto:

Gottes ist der Orient
Gottes ist der Occident

(exactly a German translation of Quran Verse *قل لله المشرق والمغرب* 2:142) while discussing the 'Oriental Movement' in German Literature the Urdu preface, Iqbal has paid a tribute to Hammer in these words:

In 1812 Von Hammer published a complete translation of the "Diwan" of Hafiz and it is this translation which work the beginning of the "Oriental Movement" of German literatureVon Hammer's translation not may fired Goethe's imagination but served at the same time as the source of his remarkable poetic ideas.

Personally, Hammer knew only one Indian and that was Mirza Abu Talib Khan who sailed from Calcutta to Europe in 1799 and on his detour to India, he met Hammer in 1802 in Istanbul where the later was an interpreter in the Austrian Embassy at the Othoman poete. Hammer was impressed by Abu Talib Khan's Persian poetry and translated some of his odes that were published in various European journals. In his Persian travelogue entitled "Masir-i-Talibi fi Bitad-i- Afrang" (completed in 1804), Abu Talib Khan referred his meeting with Hammer. A few excerpt from the relevant past are as follows:

From Hammer's company, I got much satisfaction. He is a young man of a most amiable disposition and enlightened understanding ... He is now in the service of Austrian emperor ... This gentleman translated several of my odes into English, French and German and sent them to Jordan, Paris and Vienna. He visited me everyday and introduced me to the Austrian ambassador. The ambassador and his wife are very highly esteemed in Istanbul; and , judging from their conduct and that of some others of their countrymen whom I have met ..., I concluded that the Austrian stand very high in the scale of cultured nations.

Reciprocally, Hammer also mentioned this Indian traveler and historian in his autobiography "Erinneumagen aus meinam Leben" (1940) but rather briefly and stressed note on the correct pronunciation of his name.

The friendly relations between Hammer and Abu Talib Khan continued even after the death of the later in 1806. The first edition of his 'Travels' was published posthumously in 1812 from Calcutta and was sent to Hammer. Soon its German translation by Georg Eedel came out from Vienna which was reviewed by Hammer in the

fourth volume of his “Fundgresben Des Orients” in 1814. A year before, Hammer published in this journal the Persian text (with English translation) of the verses of Abu Talib Khan in precise of Lady Elgin’s beauty.

Hammer corresponded with almost all the prominent European scholars of his time. Among them an outstanding English Sanskirtist Horace Hayman Wilson (d.1860) was also included. Commencing his oriental studies by learning Urdu, Wilson switched over to Sanskirt in which his life long contribution manifests his immense erudition. The correspondence reveals an intensive relationship between Hammer and Wilson and it chronicles the period of more than forty years. It started when Wilson was the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta). Hammer’s eighteen English letters are still unpublished in which he usually comments on Wilson’s books or reviews the activities of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

It would be interesting to note here that Wilson also responded to Hammer and at present his ten letters, from 1813 to 1841, are available: eight in the private archives of Scholars Hairfold and two in the Handschriftmabfcilung of Osferrcichische National bibliothek. In one of these letter (June 1823) it is mentioned that Wilson sent seventeen pamphlets, published by Ram Mohan Roy who was introduced to Hammer as the modern reformer of both the Hindu and Christian faiths.

A distinguished Austrian orientalist and a pupit of Hammer. Purgstall and Vineenz Von Rozenzweig– Schwannau (d. 1865) was Alos Spreager, a Tyrolean “landsnann” who is considered one of the leading authorities on the literature of Muslim India. Undoubtedly, his studies of Persian and Urdu Manuscripts are as valuable as his superb collection of hand-written material (Nachlaps Spranger) that is now howred in the staatibibliothak zu Berlin PLreussischer Kulturbeaitz.

Fourteen years stady of spranger in India (1843-1856) proved pivotal to his profound scholarship and wide-ranging bibliographical knowledge of Islamic sources. He brought to light such authentic sources of Islamic history and culture which seemed to have disappeared, for example the “Sira” of Ibn-ul-Hisham with Suhail’s commentary, parts of Waqidi, the first volume of Ibn-i-Sa’d’s *Tabaqat* in a private library of Cawnpore and further volumes in Damascuss, Parts of the annals of Tabari, Gurgani’s Vis-o-Rami (a Paithian romance) the mystical treatsis of al-Muhasibi, a fameous sufi of the ninth century and kashshaf,s encyclopacdic work on terms, used in different Muslim sciences.

Spranger's services to the Muslim educational institutions of North India (Delhi College) and Bangal (Calcutta Madrasa and Hooghli Colege) he took numerous steps not only to improve their prevalent curriculum and teaching standard but also accelerated the process of translation from the Western languages into Urdu. Thus, he brought about a scientific renaissance particularly in Delhi where he was supervising a society for Urdu translation in a very plain and accessible prose style.

Despite his own studies, spenger prompted also many local titerato for their scholarly pursuits like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who on his suggestion wrote *Asar-us-Sanadid* which shows the author's prodigious archaeological and historical recapitulation of Delhi life and also evinces a knowledge and appreciation of all facets of life in the city.

Spranger fonded in Delhi on illustrated weekly journal under the file Kiran-al-Sadayn, means the conjunction of the two auspicious planets, Jupiter and Venus, which stand for the occident and the orient. This journal covered the political and literary events of the period but its real objectives was to introduce western ideas, especially the scientific and technological progress of the West to the natives. It is also very significant for the early history of Urdu journalism.

Suffice if say, that Sprenger was the only Austrian scholar of the nineteenth century who made diligent researches in Arabic, Persian and Urdu Languages and literatures and immensely contributed to understand the intellectual cultural and historical insights of the Islamic world, including the Muslims of the South-Asian Subcontinent.

Two years after the death of Aloys Sprenger, Prof. Ernst Bannerth was born in 1895 at Eilenberg. From his youth, he took keen interest in the muslim Orient and learnt Arabic and Persian languages. In performing his duties as an interpreter of German army, he was captured in Mosul by the British who brought him to India as a Pow. In his period of captivity, he made an acquaintance with some Jesuits and with their help, he learnt Urdu. His two books entitled "*Hindustani Briefen*" (1943) and "*Lehrbuch da Hindustani Sprache*" (1945), in collaboration with Prof. Otto Spies, show explicitly the mastery he had over this language. Afterwards, he had to face many adverse circumstances, but he continued his oriental studies in Vienna University fro where he obtained his doctorate and finally received a title of "*Ausserodentlider Universitate professor*" (1965). Since 1961, he permanently settled in Cairo and as a Catholic priest and well-known orientalist, he was associated with Al-Azhar

University, Austrian consulate and the Dominicon Institute of Oriental Studies, till his death in 1976.

Most of Bannerth's studies deal with the contemporary Islamic theology and the metaphysical concepts of some leading Sufis like Abu al-Katm al-Jili, al-Ghazzali and ibn al-Arabi. During his stay in India as a war prisoner, Urdu attracted him because this language was becoming very rapidly an important vehicle of Islamic thought. His muslim friends informed him about the proformed influence of Iqbal's poetry on the masses and the literati as well. Bannerth started studying him in original when he came to know that Iqbal was also called the "Indian Goethe". As soon as two most popular poems of Iqbal namely "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i-Shikwah" (Complaint and Answer) became accessible to him, he senduced them eloquently into English verse under the tittle "Islam in Modern Urdu Poetry", published in a swiss journal "Anthropos International Zeitchrift fur Volker-und Sprachkunde" (Freiburg, 1942-45). Many versified or free English translations of there two poems have so far appeared including A.J. Arberly, and Khushwant Singh's renderings, but Bannerth took the initiative of translating them into English and maintained their poetical beauty and depth of thought.

There two poems of Iqbal extol the legacy of Islam and its civilizing role in history, bemoon the fate of Muslims everywhere, and squarely confront the dilemuas of Islam in modern times. The first poem (Shikwah) is, thus, in the form of a complaint to God for having let down the Muslim and its supplement (Jawab-i-Shikwah) is God's reply to the poet's complaint. The poem employ some of the traditional mystical imagery, are full of allusions to Persian poetry and have both historical and spiritual oucctones.

In 1942, Bannerth's translation was published and after passing the Pakistan Resolution (1940), the movement for having a separate homeland for India Muslims gained a momentum. In this context Bannerth's following remark is worth to mention:

He (Iqbal) stresses the Muslim Kingdom of God upon earth, which means nothing after than the reformation of life according to ethical principles derived from the deepest conception of God and mankind. Indian Muslims of today see also in Iqbal the creator of the Pakistan-programme. This is the demand for an independent Muslim state in a free India, which would be in touch with the whole Islamic world, where social and political life could be leased upon the fundamental teachings of the Prophet and the world-wide love of Sufism. This would imply the true natural ethics on theistic basis.

As a prisoner of war, Bannerth could not meet Iqbal, but he who fully aware of his political and poetical influences on Indian Muslims. The first Austrian who met Iqbal, was Leopard Weiss alias

Muhammad Asad (d.1992). Born in Lemberg in a Jewish family, he started his career as the correspondent of “Frankfurter Zeitung” was converted to Islam and took the name of Muhammad Asad.

As detailed under “Biographische Uebersicht” in Gunther Windhager’s recent book on an Asad (Vienna, 2002), he came to India in 1932 and soon established intimate relationship with Iqbal. The following passage of his book “Road to Mecca” (1954) clearly indicated their close friendship.

“..... after leaving Arabic I went to India and there met the great Muslim poet-philosopher and spiritual father of the Pakistan idea, Muhammad Iqbal. It was he who soon persuaded me to give up my plans for traveling to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and to remain in India to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state which was the hardly more than a dream in Iqbal’s visionary mind.”

Some of Iqbal’s Urdu letters of 1934 and the recollections of his close associates reveal that he knew the extraordinary capabilities of this young Austrian and tried to find a suitable job for him in Lahore but due to certain reasons he failed. Nevertheless, their friendship continued till Iqbal’s death in 1938 and he completed his early projects on the guidelines drawn by Iqbal. Later, Muhammad Asad served Pakistan in different capacities upto 1952 and tried to reconstruct the ideological foundations of this newly-emerged Islamic state, as visualized by his mentee, Iqbal.

Iqbal was educated in England and Germany and traveled through various European countries like France, Italy and Spain. Some of his Urdu letters still unpublished and preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan (Karachi) and Iqbal Museum (Lahore), inform that once he made up his mind to come to Austria. In 1927, he had an attack of renal colic but it was controlled by the local medical treatment. In 1934, he felt affected by exposure to cold. There was a mild attack of colic. His vocal chord was badly affected and he lost his voice. According to some medical experts, there was something wrong with the vein connecting the vocal organs to the heart, some thought that surgical operation would be necessary: some were of the view that electric treatment would cure. He preferred the treatment by ultra-violet rays and it led to some improvement, though the ailment persisted.

Meanwhile, one of Iqbal’s friends belonging to a wealthy family of Lahore, came back from Vienna after having a successful medical treatment of his chronic diabetes. During his stay in Vienna, he also consulted with the concerned physicians about Iqbal’s illness and got the assurance that if the patient could come to Vienna, he would be

all right. Iqbal's friend insisted to take him to Vienna for his proper medical treatment but he declined to accept this offer. In those days, Muhammad Asad was in Lahore and he arranged for his complete medical check-up by two German doctors who practiced there. Probably, on his suggestion, Iqbal finally decided to go to Vienna. He sent his medical reports to a close relative of his friend who was at that time a student of medicine in Vienna. Iqbal was mentally prepared to proceed to Vienna, but at the last moment he changed his mind on account of some domestic problems and the lack of traveling expenses. A few months later, he passed away.

Here, it would be interesting to mention that Iqbal, in a private gathering in Shalamar Garden (Lahore), was deeply moved by the two Austrian ladies who were invited there by the daughter of Daleep Sing, the last sikh ruler of the Punjab. He wrote two beautiful poems in Urdu (on seeing a cat in the lap of someone/on being presented with a flower) in which he has paid a homage to these Alpine beauties.

Before leaving the subject, I would like to add a few words about these seven illuminated Urdu manuscripts which are still extant in the "Handschriftenteilung" of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. Calligraphed and decorated by the royal scribes and painters, attached to the court of Wajid Ali Shah, the last ruler of Awadh, all this hand-written material provides the authentic information about the emperor's literary and artistic accomplishments, political maneuvering of the British colonialists, intriguing character of the influential courtiers and the inner life of the harem. Franz Unterkircher listed them briefly in his "Inventar der illuminierten Handschriften, Inkunabeln und Frühdrucke der ONB", but their significant contents deserve a comprehensive study and critical evaluation.

At the end, I would like to mention Schlegel's "Lebensplan" or "Lebensgefühl" that he expressed in the preface of his monumental work "Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed" and that is:

... ganz asiatische Studien zu widmen, das Morgenland zu besuchen, dort zur Einföhrung europäische Kultur beizutragen und hinwieder eine richtige Kenntnis des Orients und seiner Literatur nach Europa zurückzubringen.

IQBAL'S FINAL ADDRESS TO GOD AND
THE PROPHET

Dr. Saleha Nazeer

ABSTRACT

Armaghān-e Hijāz (The Gift of Hijaz) is the posthumous work of Muhammad Iqbal, published a few months after his death in 1938. This poetic work remains rather incomplete, because we find blank pages in the original text by Iqbal. In fact Iqbal wanted to take this work with him as a gift on the pilgrimage he had been planning for a long time but in the last years of his life, his poor health did not permit him to undertake the journey. *Armaghān-e Hijāz* is Iqbal's only bilingual book with its first part in Persian and the second in Urdu. This translation deals with the first, selecting quatrains from the Persian part of the work. Thematically, we find that Iqbal divided these quatrains into the five sections; A respectful address to God, A respectful address to the Prophet, Address to the Muslim Ummah, Address to Humanity and Address to the lovers of God. The dominant theme of *Armaghān-e Hijāz* is the love of God and of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which stimulates all of his poetic thought. The title of the book refers to the region of *Hijāz*, where lie the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. Here we see Iqbal humbly submitting to God that through the quality and worth of his prostration, He can see whether Iqbal's soul is alive or not. For Iqbal, being alive means that the human soul is conscious of his *raison-d'être* in this world.

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Armaghān-e Hijāz is Iqbal's only bilingual book with its first part in Persian and the second in Urdu. This translation deals with the first, selecting quatrains from the Persian part of the work. Thematically, we find that Iqbal divided these quatrains into the following five sections:

1. A respectful address to God
2. A respectful address to the Prophet
3. Address to the Muslim Ummah
4. Address to Humanity
5. Address to the lovers of God

Iqbal evokes the themes of death, life, the short duration of life, the oppression of his fellow Indians, injustice and inequality, the weak and down-trodden state of the Muslims and the lack of motivation and persistence in the Muslim nation. The dominant theme, however, remains that of the love of God and of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which stimulates all of his poetic thought. The title of the book refers to the region of *Hijāz*, where lie the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, in the North-west region of present-day Saudi Arabia.

In the present text I have focused on the first two thematic sections of *Armaghān-e-Hijāz* in which the reader will find Iqbal submitting to God his feelings and concern over his fellow Muslims' deplorable state. Through these quatrains one can elucidate how earnestly Iqbal wishes to revivify that faith that draws light from God's love and illuminates the whole world. This illumination is reflected in the prayers and prostrations of the believer and ensures the existence of the believer. Thus we see Iqbal humbly submitting to God that through the quality and worth of his prostration, He can see whether Iqbal's soul is alive or not. For Iqbal, being alive means that the human soul is conscious of his *raison-d'être* in this world

and that, being the vice gerent of God, he offers his total submission of heart and soul to God while he is prostrating in front of Him. An unconscious and mechanical act of prostration depicts therefore a weakened faith and a dead soul that is totally unaware of his responsibilities, capacities and abilities that God has bestowed upon him. In Iqbal's terms such a person has lost his *khudi*, i.e. self mastery and self consciousness. Khudi is the key word in Iqbal's philosophy and for a briefest understanding of the term, it may be referred to that self consciousness that leads to God.

In his book *The Secrets of the Self*, Iqbal writes :

پیکرِ هستی ز آثارِ خودی است
هر چه می بینی ز اسرارِ خودی است

The form of existence is an effect of the Self

Whatsoever thou seest is a secret of the Self¹

In the following stanzas translated in French, the reader will also see Iqbal criticizing man for spending his life in petty worldly affairs. He aspires for a perfect man who knows how to save himself from the trap of this material world, how to save his soul from becoming enslaved in this materialist society, who has vision and who has strong motivation to work as the vicegerent of God. The forehead that prostrates at the doorstep of others, cannot bring forth the prostrations of the great companions of the Prophet. Iqbal gives example of Hazrat Abu-zar Ghaffari and Hazrat Salman Farsi who are renowned for their devotion and love for God and His apostle. In yet another stanza, Iqbal compares today's scientific thought with the fire in which the Prophet Abraham (may peace and blessings be upon him) was forced to sit. Iqbal takes pride in following the footsteps of the Prophet and says that he is sitting comfortably in this fire just like Prophet Abraham sat and by divine order the fire's burning effect was transformed into a cooling effect of paradise. Iqbal declares to have broken the enchantment of the modern science that has trapped the whole nation in its charm. For Iqbal this world has turned into a temple of idols. Today's man has deviated from the purposes for which he was created and has become preoccupied by worshipping idols thereby diminishing not only his relationship with God but also with his own khudi. All of Iqbal's works are an attempt to awaken the human being to the dangers inherent in this diminishment and point to the steps that need to be taken in order to preserve and nurture the integrity of the relationship with God and of one's khudi.

Note on translation

I acknowledge at the outset of this modest translation the daunting challenge posed by the idea of translating the works of great thinkers, especially when the text is written in verse and communicates a profound philosophy. And yet, throughout this translation, I savoured the pleasure of perusing poetry that is not only elegant but of decided literary merit, frequently employing allusions, the metaphorical construction of verses and references to historical events, all in the refined vocabulary of Persian.

This is not, however, my first attempt to translate Iqbal's verse into French. I dealt with a considerable number of his texts in the course of my doctoral studies at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris, between 2005-2011. Since I was working on a comparative study of the criticism of modernity in Iqbal's thought and two Iranian thinkers, my research was based on Iqbal's Persian, Urdu and English texts. I discovered that, firstly, all of Iqbal's books have not been translated into French; and secondly, that certain French translations that were available in the market were actually translations of secondary sources. At times, the translator, not being familiar with Persian, relied solely on English translations of Iqbal's texts. For this reason, we often find a certain displacement from the original text in French translations of Iqbal. Consequently, I had no other choice but to undertake the task of translation before continuing my doctoral research project. Thus this was my original foray into translating Iqbal's poetry from the original Urdu and Persian into French.

Fortunately, my first attempt to translate Iqbal's thought was highly appreciated by my professors in France, especially by Denis Matringe, the Professor of the Centre of Indian and South Asian Studies, whose remarks reassured me and encouraged me to continue my translation plans. Moreover, other French scholars also asked me to do more translations of Iqbal's texts, considering the fact that I belong to a culture in which Iqbal lived and I speak the languages that he wrote in. All of these points combined with my doctoral studies in France and my earlier training in French language & literature gave me the confidence to render Iqbal's poetic texts into French directly from the original text in the source language.

I took *Armghān-e-Hijāz* (Gift from Hijaz), Iqbal's posthumous book for my first formal attempt; quite simply because I think that the last works – or rather, the very last work – of an author reflects the thought of the writer at its zenith and summarizes his work in a better and more succinct fashion than he could perhaps ever have

done before. The present translation draws upon the Persian part of *Armghān-e-Hijāz*; the French translation of the Urdu section is also ready and will be soon published *Insha Allah*.

In the course of this translation, my preference has been to retain the terms that Iqbal uses frequently and which will be more readily understood without translation, by means of a simple explanation given in the footnotes. For instance, today, some Arabo-persian words, like *sufi*, *moulla*, *harem* etc. have already become part of the French language. I have even seen French scholars using this lexique quite comfortably in their lectures – something that is hardly surprising in the present age, considering the socio-cultural exchange between Franco-Arab societies. This is another reason to retain this vocabulary in my French translations. Besides, the reader will also find a humble attempt to translate certain expressions of purely Islamic and oriental historical annals. For example, in order to explain the famous expression of the Sufi historical heritage, *Ana-l-Haq* انا الحق to a French-speaking reader, a commentary will be needed so that he may become acquainted with the details of the event linked to this expression. A mere hint to the name of Mansoor bin Hallaj and the 11th century Baghdad will be sufficient to lead the reader towards the event and will help him better understand the connotation and the context in which Iqbal uses it.

As for the core text, as I have already mentioned above, it was indeed a challenge for me to convey and render the philosophical thought of Iqbal not only in a foreign language, but for a public with a foreign culture. Many a time, I had to stop and search for a better way to translate the real meaning while preserving the fidelity to Iqbalian context. At times I was obliged to retain only the substance, since it was impossible to translate features of purely literary Persian forms. Consequently the rhyming literary beauty of Iqbal's Persian verse studded with symbolic and personifying elements animating his themes got lost somewhere along the translation path – something that a passionate reader of literature may reproach me for. But these are the obstacles and complexities that every translator encounters, yet one is obliged to respect such constraints.

Nonetheless, I earnestly hope that I have succeeded in remaining faithful to Iqbal's connotation as well to the context in which Iqbal frames his quatrains.

I realize that the present text translated into French presents only a random selection of the quatrains of the original book. I hope to put the finishing touches to this work in due course by rendering the unabridged text of the whole Persian book into French.

I wish every reader a fruitful reading!

حضورِ حق

Adresse respectueuse à Dieu²

خوش آن راهی که سامانی نگیرد
دل او پند یاران کم پذیرد
به آه سوزِ ناکش سینه بکشای
ز یک آهش غم صد ساله میرد

Heureux soit le voyageur³ qui ne ramasse pas la provision de la route
Son cœur accepte peu les conseils des amis ;
Ouvre ton cœur devant son soupir touchant
Car avec son seul soupir le chagrin de cent ans s'efface

دل ما بیدلان بردند و رفتند
مثال شعله افسردند و رفتند
بیا یک لحظه با عامان درآمیز
که خاصان باده با خوردند و رفتند

Les cruels⁴ ont saisi nos cœurs et se sont enfuis
Comme une flamme ils se sont éteints et sont partis
Viens un instant en compagnie de nous, les communs
Car les élites ont dégusté le vin⁵ et sont partis

سخن با رفت از بود و نبودم
من از خجالت لب خود کم گشودم
سجود زنده مردان می شناسی
عیارِ کارِ من گیر از سجودم

On parlait de mon existence et de mon non-existence
De l'embarras, je n'ai guère ouvert la bouche
Toi, Tu reconnais les prosternations des êtres vivants
De mes prosternations, juge le niveau de ma besogne⁶

دل من در گشاید چون و چند است
نگاهش از مه و پروین بلند است
بده ویرانه ئی در دوزخ او را
که این کافر بسی خلوت پسند است

Mon cœur s'occupe des « quand et combien »⁷
Bien que son regard soit plus haut que les étoiles
Accorde-lui un coin désert dans l'enfer
Car ce mécréant préfère être en solitude

چه شور است این که در آب و گل افتاد
ز یک دل عشق را صد مشکل افتاد
قرار یک نفس بر من حرام است
بمن رحمی که کارم با دل افتاد

Quel est ce bruit qui s'est produit dans le corps⁸
L'amour s'est écroulé en maintes difficultés à cause d'un seul cœur,
La paix d'un seul instant m'est interdite
Aie pitié de moi car mon affaire est avec le cœur!

جهان از خود برون آوردو کیست؟
جمالش جلوۀ بی پردۀ کیست؟
مرا گوئی که از شیطان حذر کن
بگو با من که او پرورده کیست؟

La naissance de ce monde est due à qui?
Sa beauté est la splendeur dévoilée de qui?
Tu me dis de me méfier de Satan,
(Mais) dis-moi qu'il est nourri et élevé par qui?⁹

ز من هنگامه نی ده این جهان را
دگرگون کن زمین و آسمان را
ز خاک ما دگر آدم برانگیز
بکش این بنده سود و زیان را

De mon cœur, accorde à ce monde ce vacarme¹⁰
Qui secoue¹¹ l'univers de la terre et du ciel,
De ma poussière, fais sortir un nouvel Adam
Tue cet esclave de ce monde de gain et de perte¹²!

جهانی تیره تر با آفتابی
صوابِ او سراپا نا صوابی
ندانم تا کجا ویرانه را
دهی از خونِ آدم رنگ و آبی

Ce monde est devenu plus obscur au soleil¹³
Mêmes ses qualités de la tête aux pieds sont ses défauts,
Je ne sais pas jusqu'à quand à ce désert
Tu apporteras l'éclat et la fraîcheur avec le sang d'Adam

غلام جز رضای تو نجویم
جز آن راهی که فرمودی نپویم
ولیکن گر به این نادان بگوئی
خری را اسب تازی گو نگویم

Je suis Ton esclave ; je ne cherche rien autre que Ton consentement¹⁴
Je ne choisirai autre chemin que celui que Tu m'as ordonné de
poursuivre.

Mais si Tu dis à ce sot
D'appeler un âne un cheval arabe, je ne le dirai pas.

دلی در سینه دارم بی سروری
نه سوزی در کف خاکم نه نوری
بگیر از من که بر من بار دوش است
ثواب این نماز بی حضوری

Je possède un cœur sans joie,
La poussière de mon être n'a ni lumière ni ardeur
Reprends-moi la récompense de mes prières sans ardeur
Car le poids (de cette récompense) m'a bien alourdi¹⁵

مسلمانی که در بندِ فرنگ است
دلش در دست او آسان نیاید
ز سیمائی که سودم بر در غیر
سجودِ بوذر و سلمان نیاید

Ce musulman enchaîné dans les mœurs occidentales
Ne peut pas atteindre le trésor de son cœur
Le front qui se prosterne au seuil des autres
Ne peut pas produire les prosternations de Bū-zar et Salman¹⁶

نخواهم این جهان و آن جهان را
مرا این بس که دائم رمز جان را
سجودی ده که از سوز و سرورش
بوجد آرم زمین و آسمان را

Je ne veux ni ce monde ni le monde de l'au-delà
Il me suffit que je sache le secret de l'âme
Accorde-moi cette prosternation, avec la ferveur et l'ardeur de laquelle
Le ciel et la terre se mettent en extase

نگاه تو عتاب آلود تا چند
بتان حاضر و موجود تا چند
درین بت خانه اولادِ برابیم
نمک پرورده نمروود تا چند

Ton regard sera plein de réprimandes jusqu'à quand?
Ces idoles présents resteront jusqu'à quand?
Dans ce temple d'idoles¹⁷, les enfants d'Abraham¹⁸
Serviront Nemrod¹⁹ jusqu'à quand?

سرودِ رفته باز آید که ناید؟
نسیبی از حجاز آید که ناید؟
سر آمد روزگار این فقیری
دگر دانای راز آید که ناید؟

La mélodie d'autrefois se retournerait-elle ou non?
La brise matinale du Hidjaz se retournerait-elle ou non?
La vie de ce derviche est arrivée à sa fin
Un autre savant (des secrets de la vie) viendrait-il ou non?

اگر می آید آن دانای رازی
بده او را نوای دل گدازی
ضمیر امتان را می کند پاک
کلیمی یا کلیمی نی نوازی

Si ce savant (des secrets de la vie) vient
Accorde-lui cette mélodie touchante
Le cœur des peuples ne se purifient qu'avec
Le *kalim*²⁰ ou le poète-philosophe²¹

چنین دور آسمان کم دیده باشد
که جبرئیل امین را دل خراشد
چه خوش دیری بنا کردند آنجا
پرستد مومن و کافر تراشد

Le ciel n'aurait guère vu un temps pareil
Qui a blessé même le cœur de Gabriel
Quel beau temple d'idoles a-t-on bâti
Le mécréant le construit tandis que le musulman l'adore²²

مسلمان فاقه مست و ژنده پوش است
ز کارش جبرئیل اندر خروش است
بیا نقش دگر ملت بریزیم
که این ملت جهان را بارِ دوش است

Le musulman d'aujourd'hui se contente de pratiquer la pauvreté et
d'être en haillons
Gabriel, lui aussi, crie en regardant cette besogne du musulman
Viens fonder une nouvelle nation!
Car cette nation n'est qu'un fardeau pour ce monde

دگر ملت که کاری پیش گیرد
دگر ملت که نوش از نیش گیرد
نگردد با یکی عالم رضامند
دو عالم را به دوش خویش گیرد

Réalisons une autre nation qui préfère faire la besogne
Une autre nation qui puisse tirer le délice de la douleur²³
Qui ne se contente pas d'un seul monde, mais
Qui saurait porter les deux mondes sur ses épaules²⁴

دگر قومی که ذکرِ لالهش
بر آرد از دلِ شبِ صبحگاهش
شناسد منزلش را آفتابی
که ریگِ کلهکشان رابد ز راهش

Une autre nation dont les invocations et la louange de Dieu
Produisent du milieu de la nuit son beau matin
Même le soleil connaisse la destination de cette nation
Et balaie la poussière des constellations dans son chemin

جهانِ تست در دستِ خسی چند
کسانِ او به بندِ ناکسی چند
هنرور میانِ کارگهان
کشد خود را به عیشِ کرکسی چند

Ton monde est dans les mains de quelques individus méprisables
Ses nobles sont emprisonnés par quelques individus ignobles
Dans ses usines, les talentueux se sacrifient
Pour rendre joyeuse la vie de quelques vautours²⁵

ز محکومی مسلمان خود فروش است
گرفتارِ طلسم چشم و گوش است
ز محکومی رگان در تن چنان است
که ما را شرع و آئین بارِ دوش است

Dans l'esclavage le musulman s'est mis à vendre
Il est captif de la sorcellerie de l'œil et de l'oreille²⁶
L'esclavage a tellement affaibli les veines de son corps²⁷
Que l'on sent lourd la loi sainte sur nos épaules

بپایان چون رسد این عالم پیر
شود بی پرده هر پوشیده تقدیر
مکن رسوا حضورِ خواجه مارا
حسابِ من ز چشم او نهان گیر

Quand se vieux monde arrive à son terme²⁸
Et tout destin caché se révèle
Ne me déshonore pas devant notre maître²⁹
Interroge-moi sur mes comptes en les cachant de notre maître

حضورِ رسالت

Adresse au Prophète³⁰

به این پیری ره یثرب گرفتم
نوا خوان از سرود عاشقانه
چو آن مرغی که در صحرا سر شام
گشاید پر به فکرِ آشیانه

Je me suis mis sur la route de la Médine
En chantant des poèmes d'amour
Comme cet oiseau dans le désert qui
Soucieux de son nid, ouvre les ailes à l'arrivée du soir³¹

چه خوش صحرا که در وی کاروانها
درودی خواند و محمل براند
به ریگِ گرم او آور سجودی
جبین را سوز تا داغی بماند

Quel heureux désert à travers lequel les caravanes passent,
Chantant des salutations³² en portant des voyageurs³³
Ils se prosternent sur le sable chaud du désert
Pour faire brûler le front comme un signe de prostration

امیر کاروان آن اعجمی کیست؟
سرود او به آهنگِ عرب نیست
زند آن نغمه کز سیرابی او
خنک دل در بیابانی توان زیست

O chef de caravane! qui est ce non arabe³⁴?
Dont la mélodie ne correspond pas avec le rythme arabe
Il a chanté cette chanson avec la sensation rassasiée de laquelle
On peut passer la vie en plein désert à cœur frais

تب و تابِ دل از سوزِ غم تست
نوایِ من ز تاثیرِ دم تست
بنالم زانکه اندر کشور هند
ندیدم بنده کی کو محرم تست

Mon cœur a son éclat grâce à l'ardeur de ton amour
Ma poésie a son effet grâce à ton esprit
Je pleure parce qu'en Inde
Je n'ai vu personne qui soit ton confident³⁵

شب هندی غلامان را سحر نیست
به این خاک آفتابی را گذر نیست
بما کن گوشه چشمی که در شرق
مسلمانی ز ما بیچاره تر نیست

Pour la nuit des esclaves indiens, il n'y a pas de matin
Le soleil ne brille pas sur ce paysage
Jette un regard béni³⁶ vers nous car en Orient
Aucun musulman n'est dans un état plus pire que nous

چنان احوالِ او را بر لب آرم
تو می بینی نهان و آشکارم
ز رودادِ دو صد سالش همین بس
که دل چون کنده قصاب دارم

Comment puis-je présenter son état
Ce qui est caché et ce qui est manifeste, tout est devant toi
Pour les deux cents ans de son histoire, il suffit à dire que
Mon cœur est devenu émoussé³⁷

نماند آن تاب و تب در خونِ نابش
زروید لاله از کشتِ خرابش
نیام او تهی چون کیسه او
به طاقِ خانه ویران کتابش

Le sang pur de son être ne possède plus cette ardeur
Dans sa plantation déserte, les fleurs de tulipe ne poussent plus
Comme sa poche, son fourreau d'épée est vide
Son livre³⁸ gît sur l'étagère ruiné

دل خود را اسیر رنگ و بو کرد
تهی از ذوق و شوق و آرزو کرد
صغیر شاهبازان کم شناسد
که گوشش با طنین پشه خو کرد

Il a mis son cœur en captivité du monde artificiel
Il l'a vidé de toute inspiration, motivation et volonté
Il reconnaît peu la voix des aigles
Car son oreille est habituée à la voix des moustiques

حق آن ده که «مسکین و اسیر» است
فقیر و غیرتِ او دیر میر است
بروی او در میخانه بستند
در این کشور مسلمان تشنه میر است

Donne-lui son droit car il est malheureux et prisonnier
Il est pauvre et depuis longtemps son amour-propre est mort
Les portes de taverne³⁹ sont fermées pour lui
Dans ce pays le musulman meurt tout assoiffé

مپرس از من که احوالش چسان است
زمینش بدگهر چون آسمان است
بر آن مرغی که پروردی به انجیر
تلاش دانه در صحرا گران است

Ne me demande pas de ses nouvelles
Comme le ciel, la terre est aussi tournée contre lui
Cet oiseau, que tu as nourri des figues,
A du mal à chercher la graine dans le désert

مسلمانان به خویشان در ستیزند
بجز نقشِ دوئی بر دل نریزند
بنالند از کسی خشتی بگیرد
از آن مسجد که خود از وی گریزند

Les musulmans se querellent entre eux
Ils n'acceptent que l'empreint d'autrui sur le cœur⁴⁰
Ils crient si quelqu'un s'empare d'une seule brique de la mosquée
Et pourtant eux, ils s'enfuient de la mosquée

سبوی خانقاهان خالی از می
کند مکتب ره طی کرده را طی
ز بزم شاعران افسرده رفتم
نواها مرده بیرون افتد ازنی

Il n'y pas de vin⁴¹ dans la cruche des tavernes
A l'école, on apprend les leçons déjà parcourues
Désespéré, j'ai quitté le festin de poètes
Car des chansons mortes émergent de leur chalumeau

نگهبانِ حرم معمارِ دیر است
یقینش مرده و چشمش به غیر است
ز اندازِ نگاهِ او توان دید
که نومید از همه اسبابِ خیر است

Le gardien de Harem⁴² s'est mis à construire des temples
Sa foi est morte et son regard cherche l'appuie des étrangers
De sa façon de regarder même, on peut dire
Qu'il a perdu tout espoir de sa bien être

به افرونگی بتان دل باختم من
ز تاب دیریان بگداختم من
چنان از خویشتن بیگانه بودم
چو دیدم خویش را نشناختم من

J'ai perdu mon cœur aux idoles occidentales
Je suis fondu de l'éclat de ces idoles
Tant je suis devenu étrange pour moi-même
Lorsque je m'en suis aperçu, je ne me suis pas reconnu moi-même

می از میخانه مغرب چشیدم
بجان من که درد سر خریدم
نشستم با نکویان فرنگی
از آن بی سوز تر روزی ندیدم

J'ai acheté du vin de la taverne de l'occident
Par Dieu, j'ai acheté le mal de tête
J'étais en compagnie des nobles de l'Europe,
Je n'ai vu aucun jour avec aussi peu d'ardeur

طلسم علم حاضر را شکستم
ربودم دانه و دامش گسستم
خدا داند که مانند برابیم
به نار او چه بی پروا نشستم

J'ai brisé l'enchantement de la science d'aujourd'hui,
J'ai enlevé la graine et j'ai cassé son piège,
Dieu sait que, comme Abraham,
Avec quelle indifférence je suis assis dans son feu!

بده دستی ز پا افتادگان را
به غیرالله دل نادادگان را
از آن آتش که جان من بر افروخت
نصیبی ده مسلمان زادگان را

Donne ta main à ces musulmans tombés
Qui n'ont donné le cœur qu'à Dieu
Ce feu d'amour qui a fait illuminer mon âme,
A ces musulmans, accorde-le!

مسلمانیم و آزاد از مکانیم
برون از حلقه نه آسمانیم
بما آموختند آن سجده کز وی
بهایی هر خداوندی بدانیم

Etant musulmans, nous, on est libre de l'espace
Notre portée est au-delà de neuf ciels
On nous a appris cette prosternation
Qui nous fait juger la valeur de chaque dieu⁴³

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Iqbal, M. *Asrar-e-khudi* (The Secrets of the Self). 1915. Eng. tr. from Persian by R. A. Nicholson. Lahore : Sh. M. Ashraf, , 1944.

² Iqbal a divisé ce recueil en 5 sections, s'adressant à Dieu, au Prophète, à la nation musulmane, au monde humain et aux confrères religieux. Les quatrains de cette section s'adressent à Dieu.

³ Indication du poète vers lui-même qui pratique un comportement d'indifférence face aux biens mondains ;

⁴ Iqbal emploie le mot persan *bi-dil* qui signifie littéralement une personne sans cœur et sans pitié ;

⁵ Réf. au vin de l'amour divin ;

⁶ En s'adressant à Dieu, le poète lui demande d'évaluer ses prosternations ; quoiqu'il espère être parmi les vivants, dont les prosternations sont pleines d'ardeur, il est embarrassé de son incompetence ;

⁷ Il s'occupe des affaires mondaines ;

⁸ Iqbal se réfère à lui-même, à son propre corps ;

⁹ Le poète n'arrive pas à comprendre le paradoxe que Dieu nous demande de ne pas suivre le chemin de Satan ; de l'autre côté Dieu le nourrit et lui permet de nous tendre ses pièges.

¹⁰ Ce vacarme que témoigne le poète en lui-même se traduit par une sorte de révolte en lui – la révolte contre la pensée esclave de l'homme moderne (esclavage matériel, comme Iqbal souligne dans le dernier vers de ce quatrain.

¹¹ Secouer et remuer le monde pour que l'homme se réveille et se rende compte de sa raison d'être, de son vrai rôle dans le monde ;

¹² Iqbal sollicite un nouvel Adam - un homme qui remplace l'homme d'aujourd'hui sans vision et sans action, et qui remplace le rôle de vice régence de Dieu sur terre. Le poète condamne l'homme actuel pour sa poursuite matérielle dans ce monde.

¹³ Le soleil illumine la forme apparente de toutes les choses sur lesquelles il brille. De même il éclaire la réalité de ce monde : ce monde apparaît plus sombre et plus noir au soleil. Pour le poète cette noirceur du monde symbolise ses maux et ses défauts.

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- ¹⁴ Le poète affirme son amour de Dieu et cherche Sa volonté, Son plaisir et Son contentement par pur amour de Dieu.
- ¹⁵ Face à ses prières sans ardeur, Iqbal ne se juge pas digne de cette récompense ;
- ¹⁶ Référence à deux des fameux compagnons du dernier Prophète d'islam : *Bu-ḡar Ghaffari* et *Salman Fārsi*, (que Dieu soit content avec eux) ; les deux étaient connus pour une foi ferme et pour leur amour profond pour le Prophète.
- ¹⁷ Le monde contemporain
- ¹⁸ Le peuple musulman colonisé
- ¹⁹ Les colonisateurs et les impérialistes
- ²⁰ Allusion au prophète Moïse à qui on a attribué le nom de *Kalim* suite à sa conversation avec Allah ;
- ²¹ Iqbal se réfère à sa propre poésie ;
- ²² Indication que dans le monde d'aujourd'hui dominé par les idées laïques de l'Occident, le musulman adore et poursuit la pensée des mécréants ;
- ²³ La construction persane *nuch-o niche* signifie « bonheur et malheur » ; ici le poète emploie cette expression pour indiquer vers une autre nation qui saurait se faire renaitre à travers les difficultés et les épreuves
- ²⁴ Indication vers la puissance énorme de cette nouvelle nation que désire le poète ;
- ²⁵ Critique sur les capitalistes qui exploitent le service des travailleurs ;
- ²⁶ Il est séduit par ce monde matériel ;
- ²⁷ Le poète paraît créer une allusion au verset coranique, n° 17, de la sourate n° 50, *Qaf* dans lequel Dieu affirme : « Nous sommes plus près de lui que sa veine jugulaire ».
- ²⁸ C'est-à-dire à la fin du monde
- ²⁹ Le dernier prophète Mohammad – *la paix et le salut soient sur lui*
- ³⁰ Le Prophète Mohammad – *la paix et le salut soient sur lui*
- ³¹ L'arrivée de la vieillesse est exprimée avec l'arrivée du soir
- ³² Les salutations s'adressant au Prophète s'appellent *dorid* en terme arabe
- ³³ Voyageurs aux litières à chameau
- ³⁴ Iqbal réfère à lui-même
- ³⁵ Qui te connaisse, qui sache ta grandeur, c'est-à-dire qui respecte et poursuit tes conseils
- ³⁶ Iqbal, plongé dans son imagination, se considère dans la cour du Prophète et lui parle d'un ton suppliant
- ³⁷ Son cœur est devenu émoussé en supportant des souffrances et des agonies d'esclavage au cours des siècles.
- ³⁸ Livre sacré du Coran qui se sert de guide de sa vie
- ³⁹ Emploi classique du mot 'taverne' en persan signifie la connotation opposée, celle de spiritualité et de piété
- ⁴⁰ Ils ne manifestent plus leur propre personnalité. Peut-être Iqbal veut-il dire que le musulman d'aujourd'hui passe sa vie dans une poursuite aveugle des autres en niant sa propre khudi.
- ⁴¹ C'est le vin de l'amour divin ; ici on remarque l'emploi métaphorique de vin et de taverne.
- ⁴² Grande Mosquée de la Mecque, débarrassée de toutes idoles avec l'arrivée de l'islam au 6^e siècle
- ⁴³ Une seule prosternation nous libère de l'esclavage de faux dieux.