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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)*

**T**he 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 Zamakhsharī, 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 *Mathnawi* of Jalāl al-Din 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 (*hubūṭ*) 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 (*Tawhīd*), 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.<sup>1</sup>

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### **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;<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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*,<sup>5</sup> 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 *Allāh* 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 *Allāh* 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 (*jamhar*) 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 (*hulūl*) 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 (*kufr*) [...] 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 (*‘aliman*) is other than the concept of Him being Omnipotent (*qādiran*) or Living (*ḥayyan*).<sup>6</sup>

Even if the ‘trinity’ being refuted here is conceived as consisting of the Father, Jesus and Mary,<sup>7</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> 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’<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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 *Tawhid*, 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 lowliness 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.’<sup>14</sup>

However, even if the Christian dogmas fall short of the requirements of *Tawhid*, 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 9<sup>th</sup> year after the Hijra (631)<sup>15</sup> 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—infinity, 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,<sup>16</sup> and He says: "I am your Lord", and they reply: "You are our Lord!"'<sup>17</sup>

#### **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.'<sup>18</sup> 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] ...'<sup>19</sup>

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.'<sup>20</sup>

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.’<sup>221</sup>

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.’<sup>222</sup>

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 ...”<sup>223</sup>

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.’<sup>224</sup> The word ‘with’ translates *‘inda*, which might also be translated as ‘present within/as/to’<sup>225</sup>: 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...’<sup>26</sup>

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”.’<sup>27</sup>

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.’<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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, *Tarjūmān 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.<sup>30</sup>

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).<sup>31</sup>

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”’.<sup>32</sup>

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.’<sup>33</sup>

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.’<sup>34</sup> 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...’<sup>35</sup>

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.'<sup>36</sup>

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.'<sup>37</sup>

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'.<sup>38</sup>

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 khafi* was described by the Prophet as being 'more hidden than a black ant crawling on a dark stone in a moonless night'.<sup>39</sup>

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.’<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> 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.’<sup>42</sup>

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.<sup>43</sup> '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.'<sup>44</sup> 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.'<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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.'<sup>48</sup>

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.'<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup>

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.’<sup>51</sup> 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.’<sup>52</sup> 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.’<sup>53</sup>

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.’<sup>54</sup> 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.’<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>257</sup>

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.<sup>258</sup>

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.<sup>59</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.cutsinger.net/scholarship/articles.shtml))

<sup>2</sup> 'For every community there is a Messenger' (10:47).

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

<sup>4</sup> 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'.

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, op. cit., p.63.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p.54.

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

<sup>15</sup> There is some discrepancy in the sources about the precise date of this event.

<sup>16</sup> The wording here is extremely important: *wa-qad tabammala fī sūratihī allatī ra'ūbu fihā annwal marra*.

<sup>17</sup> This version of the saying comes in the *Sabīb 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.

<sup>18</sup> *Fusus al-bikam*, 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.

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

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

<sup>21</sup> *Sufi Path*, op. cit., p.58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244

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

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

<sup>26</sup> *Sufi Path*, p.337.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

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

<sup>30</sup> Tarjuman, 52

<sup>31</sup> *Tarjuman*, p.70. Cf. Hatif Isfahani, p.30.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> *Mystical Theology*, op.cit., p.39.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

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

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>39</sup> 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'ānic 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



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

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

<sup>41</sup> 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 ‘Alī* (London: IB Tauris, 2005) for discussion of the spiritual perspectives of this seminal figure in the Islamic tradition.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>43</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 150-151

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> *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.

<sup>48</sup> *Justice and Remembrance*, *op.cit.*, p.

<sup>49</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp.339 & 341.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in *Justice and Remembrance*, *op.cit.*, pp.208-209.

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

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

<sup>53</sup> 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.*

<sup>54</sup> *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

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

<sup>56</sup> See [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com) for the text itself, and the responses thereto.

<sup>57</sup> 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.

<sup>58</sup> See the full text of the Archbishop’s response on [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com).

<sup>59</sup> *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.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE:  
SOME OBSERVATIONS IN THE CONTEXT  
OF ISLAM–WEST ENCOUNTER

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

## ABSTRACT

Inalienable natural rights than on the notion that all truth is relative, then perhaps mainstream Islamist thinking will need to unhitch itself more explicitly from the broadly Western paradigms which it accepted for most of the twentieth century. Yet the relation Islam/Enlightenment seems predicated on simplistic definitions of both. Islamism may be an Enlightenment project, but conservative Sufism (for instance) is probably not. Conversely, even without adopting a postmodern perspective we are not so willing today to assume a necessary antithesis between tradition and reason. The way forward, probably, is to recognize that Islam genuinely converges with Enlightenment concerns on some issues; while on other matters, notably the Enlightenment's individualism and its increasingly Promethean confidence in humanity's autonomous capacities, it is likely to demur radically.

What matters about Islam is that it did not produce the modern world. If modernity ends in a technologically-induced holocaust, then survivors will probably hail the religion's wisdom in not authoring something similar. If, however, it survives, and continues to produce a global monoculture where the past is forgotten, and where international laws and customs are increasingly restrictive of cultural difference, then Islam is likely to remain the world's great heresy. The Ishmaelite alternative is rejected. But what if Ishmael actually wishes to be rejected, since the one who is doing the rejecting has ended up creating a world without God? Grounded in our stubbornly immobile liturgy and doctrine, we Ishmaelites should serve the invaluable, though deeply resented, function of a culture which would like to be an Other, even if that is no longer quite possible!

*Soiling one's tongue with ill-speech is a sin  
The disbeliever and the believer are alike creatures of God.  
Humanity, human respect for human reality:  
Be conscious of the station of humanity.*

...

*The slave of love who takes his path from God  
Becomes a loving friend of both disbeliever and believer.<sup>1</sup>*

Thus sang the sage, Iqbal the poet-philosopher, in his magnum opus, the *Javid Nama* (Pilgrimage of Eternity). He was not the sole spokesman. In the years immediately before and after the First World War, the western world was hearing to three poetic voices. The first was Tagore;<sup>2</sup> the second voice was of T. S. Eliot;<sup>3</sup> the third voice was that of Iqbal.<sup>4</sup> In the late stage of secular modernity, when Iqbal pondered over the problems of his age, melancholy had become a collective mood. Melancholy used to afflict individuals who felt rejected and exiled from the significance of the cosmos. By Iqbal's day it had turned into a cultural malady deriving from a world that has been drained of all meaning and which had come to cast doubt on all traditional sources— theological, metaphysical, and historical. The dominant mood of Iqbal's time was “**A desperate search for a pattern.**” The search was desperate because it seemed futile to look for a pattern in reality. In terms of its mindset or worldview the modern world was living in what has been called the *Age of Anxiety*, and Iqbal, feeling the pulse of the times, was trying to look beyond symptoms to find the prime cause. Through his studies and observation of the modern world Iqbal had come to realize that there was something wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that his age had come to espouse. What was that which generated the feeling that something had gone wrong with the world and the Time was again out of joint? East and West both seemed to face a predicament!

فکرِ فرنگِ پیشِ مجازِ آوردِ سجود  
بینایِ کور و مستِ تماشایِ رنگ و بوست

مشرق خراب و مغرب از آن بیشتر خراب  
عالم تمام مرده و بی ذوق جستجوست<sup>5</sup>

Iqbal was seriously thinking about the grave question.

من از بلال و چلیپا دگر نیندیشم  
که فتنه دگری در ضمیر ایام است

*I am no longer concerned about the crescent and the cross,  
For the womb of time carries an ordeal of a different kind.*<sup>6</sup>

In Iqbal's view, the crisis that the world found itself in as it swung on the hinge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was located in something deeper than particular ways of organizing political systems and economies. In different ways, the East and the West were going through a single common crisis whose cause was the spiritual condition of the modern world. That condition was characterized by loss— the loss of religious certainties and of transcendence with its larger horizons. The nature of that loss is strange but ultimately quite logical. When, with the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, meaning began to ebb and the stature of humanity to diminish. The world lost its human dimension, and we began to lose control of it. In the words of F. Schuon:

The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means binding him again to Heaven, re-establishing the broken link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from the cult of matter, quantity and cunning, and reintegrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity, we would even say: into the world of sufficient reason.<sup>7</sup>

In Iqbal's view, if anything characterizes the modern era, it is a loss of faith in transcendence, in God as an objective reality. It is the age of eclipse of transcendence. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized Modernity. The eclipse of transcendence impacts our way of looking at the world, that is, forming a world view, in a far-reaching manner. According to Iqbal's perspective, Transcendence means that there is another reality that is

more real, more powerful, and better than this mundane order. The eclipse of transcendence impacted our way of looking at the world, that is, forming a worldview? It was an issue of the greatest magnitude in Iqbal's opinion. He was convinced that whatever transpires in other domains of life— politics, living standards, environmental conditions, interpersonal relationships, the arts— was ultimately dependent on our presiding world view. This is what was wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that his age had come to espouse (فتنه عصر روان). In Iqbal's view, Modern Westerners, forsaking clear thinking, allowed themselves to become so obsessed with life's material underpinnings that they had written science a blank cheque; a blank cheque for science's claims concerning what constituted Reality, knowledge and justified belief. This was the cause of our spiritual crisis. It joined other crises as we entered the new century—the environmental crisis, the population explosion, the widening gulf between the rich and the poor.

دو صد دانا درین محفل سخن گفت  
سخن نازک تر از برگ سمن گفت  
ولی با من بگو آن دیده ور کیست؟  
که خاری دید و احوال چمن گفت

*The Man who saw a thorn and spoke of the garden?...<sup>8</sup>*

That science had changed our world beyond recognition went without saying, but it was the way that it had changed our worldview that concerned Iqbal. More importantly, the two worldviews were contending for the mind of the future. The scientific worldview is a wasteland for the human spirit. It cannot provide us the where withal for a meaningful life. How much, then, was at stake? That was the fundamental question; and it surfaced again and again throughout his prose and poetry. The overarching question that occupied Iqbal at that time related to the view of Reality; of the *WORLDVIEWS: THE BIG PICTURE*. It was of great consequence to ask as to *WHO WAS RIGHT ABOUT REALITY: TRADITIONALISTS, MODERNISTS, OR THE POSTMODERNS* (which he anticipated)? The problem, according to his lights, was that somewhere, during the course of its historical development, western thought took a sharp turn in a different direction. It branched off as a tangent from the collective heritage of all humanity and claimed the autonomy of reason. It chose to follow reason alone, unguided by revelation and cut off from its transcendent root.<sup>9</sup> Political and social realms quickly followed suit. Autonomous statecraft and excessive

individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful.<sup>10</sup> Iqbal struggled with the conflicts that existed between the scientific and traditional worldviews. There were five places where these contradicted each other.

- According to the traditional, religious view spirit is fundamental and matter derivative. The scientific worldview turns this picture on its head.
- In the religious worldview human beings are the less who have derived from the more. Science reverses this etiology, positioning humanity as the more that has derived from the less; devoid of intelligence at its start, evolving and advancing to the elevated stature that we human beings now enjoy.
- The traditional worldview points toward a happy ending; the scientific worldview does not. As for the scientific worldview, there is no way that a happy ending can be worked into it. Death is the grim reaper of individual lives, and whether things as a whole will end in a freeze or a fry, with a bang or a whimper is anybody's guess.
- This fourth contrast between the competing worldviews concerns meaning. Having been intentionally created by omnipotent Perfection—<sup>11</sup> or flowing from it “like a fountain ever on,”— the traditional world is meaningful throughout. In the scientific worldview, meaning is minimal if not absent. “Our modern understanding of evolution implies that ultimate meaning in life is nonexistent.”<sup>12</sup> Science acknowledges that “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.”
- In the traditional world people feel at home. Nothing like this sense of belonging can be derived from the scientific worldview which is the dawning of “the age of homelessness.”

Iqbal realized that an age comes to a close when people discover they can no longer understand themselves by the theory their age professes. For a while its denizens will continue to think that they believe it, but they feel otherwise and cannot understand their feelings. This had now happened to his world.

Even today, when traditional peoples want to know where they are— when they wonder about the ultimate context in which their lives are set and which has the final say over them— they turn to their sacred texts; or in the case of oral, tribal peoples (what comes to the same thing), to the sacred myths that have been handed down to



them by their ancestors. *Modernity* was born when a new source of knowledge was discovered, the scientific method. Because its controlled experiment enabled scientists to prove their hypothesis, and because those proven hypotheses demonstrated that they had the power to change the material world dramatically, Westerners turned from revelation to science for the Big Picture. Intellectual historians tell us that by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Westerners were already more certain that atoms exist than they were confident of any of the distinctive things the Bible speaks of.

This much is straightforward, but it doesn't explain why Westerners aren't still modern rather than Postmodern, for science continues to be the main support of the Western mind. By headcount, most Westerners probably still *are* modern, but I am thinking of frontier thinkers who chart the course that others follow. These thinkers have ceased to be modern because they have seen through the so-called scientific worldview, recognizing it to be not *scientific* but *scientistic*. They continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature or the natural order/natural world, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview— not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear.<sup>13</sup>

In his second lecture, “The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience”, in *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam* Iqbal has made a very perceptive remark:<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that the theories of science constitute trustworthy knowledge, because they are verifiable and enable us to predict and control the events of Nature. But we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality— fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together. Natural Science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that

selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus religion, which demands the whole of Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural Science is by nature sectional; it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality.

Where, then, do we now turn for an inclusive worldview? Postmodernism hasn't a clue. And this is its deepest definition.<sup>15</sup> The generally accepted definition of Postmodernism now that Jean-Francois Lyotard fixed in place decades ago in *The Postmodern Condition* is, "incredulity toward metanarratives".<sup>16</sup> Having deserted revelation for science, the West has now abandoned the scientific worldview as well, leaving it without replacement. In this it mirrors the current stage of Western science which leaves *nature* unimaged. Before modern science, Westerners accepted Aristotle's model of the earth as surrounded by concentric, crystalline spheres. Newton replaced that model with his image of a clockwork universe, but Postmodern, quantum-and-relativity science gives us not a third model of nature but no model at all. Alan Wallace's *Choosing Reality* delineates eight different interpretations of quantum physics, all of which can claim the support of physics' proven facts.<sup>17</sup> A contemporary philosopher described the situation as "*the Reality Market Place*"—you can have as many versions of reality as you like.

Another analogy can pull together all that we have just said and summarize the difference alluded to in these remarks. If we think of traditional peoples as looking out upon the world through the window of revelation (their received myths and sacred texts), the window that they turned to look through in the modern period (science) proved to be stunted. It cuts off at the level of the human nose, which (metaphysically speaking) means that when we look through it our gaze slants downward and we see only things that are inferior to us.<sup>18</sup> As for the Postmodern window, it is boarded over and allows no inclusive view whatsoever. In the words of Richard Rorty, "There is no Big Picture." This analogy is drawn from the works of one of the traditionalist writers, namely, Huston Smith, who is by far the easiest to understand. It is fascinating to note that Iqbal not only mediates between these conflicting views in exactly the same manner by pointing out to the shortcomings and

achievements of all the three paradigms objectively but– and that is remarkable– uses the same analogy. Smith or Iqbal never met or read each other! Iqbal agrees that there is a Big Picture and his writings give us to understand that the Postmodern view of the self and its world is in no way nobler than the ones that the world’s religions proclaim. Postmoderns yield to their dilapidated views, not because they like them, but because they think that reason and human historicity now force them upon us. Iqbal would argue that it is not necessarily the case and the present predicament is the result of a tunnel vision that we have adopted but which really is not the only option for us. Here is Iqbal’s depiction of the conceptual shift that the enlightenment project and modernity’s world view had brought in the human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia. Cultures and their world-views are ruled by their mandarins, the intellectuals and they, as well as their institutions that shape the minds that rule the modern world are unreservedly secular. The poem is addressed to our present day intellectual mandarins, the leaders of the academia.<sup>19</sup>

شیخ مکتب سے  
شیخ مکتب ہے اک عمارت گر جس کی صنعت ہے رُوحِ انسانی  
نکتہ دلپذیر تیرے لیے کہ گیا ہے حکیم قآنی  
”پیش خورشید بر کش دیوار  
خواہی ار سخن خانہ نورانی“

### *To the Schoolman*

*The Schoolman is an architect  
The artefact he shapes and moulds is the human soul;  
Something remarkable for you to ponder  
Has been left by the Sage, Qā’ānī;  
“Do not raise a wall in the face of the illuminating Sun  
If you wish the courtyard of your house to be filled with light”*

What does the metaphor of خورشید (the illuminating Sun) in this analogy try to convey which, in the parallel analogy used by Huston Smith, is depicted by the stunted/slanted window of Modernity that resulted in a truncated, tunnel vision and the Postmodern window, boarded all over, thus precluding the possibility of any world view what so ever! And this is intimately connected to our initial remarks

about (فتنه عصر روان), the challenge posed by the modern age of secular modernity and materialism, which Iqbal, like Rūmī, takes up.

The most important question that concerned Iqbal in this period related to the conceptual shift that the enlightenment project and modernity's worldview had brought in the human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia, and the means of repairing the ills. Iqbal's contemporary discourse was marked by incredulity. Incredulity toward metaphysics. There was no consensual worldview. The incredulity took many forms that grew increasingly shrill as they proceeded. Minimally, it contented itself with pointing out that "we have no maps and don't know how to make them." Hardliners added, "and never again will we have a consensual worldview! In short, Iqbal's contemporary discourse was filled with voices critiquing the truncated worldview of the Enlightenment, but from that reasonable beginning it plunged on to argue unreasonably that world-views (or grand narratives) are misguided in principle. Wouldn't we be better off if we extricate ourselves from the worldview we had unwittingly slipped into and replace it with a more generous and accurate one that shows us deeply connected to the final nature of things? Iqbal contemplated.<sup>20</sup> He had realized that a world ends when its metaphor dies, and modernity's metaphor-endless progress through science-powered technology— was dead. It was only cultural lag— the backward pull of the outgrown good— that keeps us running on it.

Already at the opening of the last century, when Postmodernism had not yet emerged on the scene, Yeats was warning that things were falling apart, that the centre didn't hold. Gertrude Stein followed him by noting that "in the twentieth century nothing is in agreement with anything else," and Ezra Pound saw man as "hurling himself at indomitable chaos"— the most durable line from the play *Green Pastures* has been, "Everything that's tied down is coming loose." T. S. Eliot found "The Wasteland" and "The Hollow Men" as appropriate metaphors for the outward and the inward aspects of our predicament.<sup>21</sup> Poetry of first magnitude or great poetry itself works as a bridge and with inevitable particularities always carries an aspect of universality. It brings you face to face with questions that are truly perennial human questions and not just Muslim or Christian or Hindu questions; who am I? What does it mean to be human?? Where have I come from? Where am I going? What is this universe and how am I related to it? Great poetry may seem grounded in a certain particular idiom or a specific universe of discourse but it always opens out onto the universal.

While Iqbal's cotemporaries were lamenting the state of the world with its shaky institutions and rudderless situation with the dominant mood of melancholy, without suggesting a viable alternative, Iqbal had a message of hope. The conclusion is that if for the survival of humanity it is necessary for man to respect his fellow-men; in the same way it is necessary for him to learn to respect religions other than his own. It is only through the adoption of this moral and spiritual approach that, borrowing Iqbal's phrase, "man may rise to a fresh vision of his future." And this brings us to the opening point of our discourse, "*Be conscious of the station of humanity*" which is intimately related to the question of the "Other"—religious, cultural, political— which, in turn, subsumes the issue of "tolerance" that we wish to address in this paper from the point of view of **Kinship of Thought between Islam and the West**. It, however, calls for a few remarks of a different order as our point of departure.

I would allow Robert Whitemore to make the point. He had observed:<sup>22</sup>

Examine Western philosophy from an Islamic standpoint and one characteristic of it is inescapable: from Thales to Wittgenstein Western thought has been for the most part invariably insular, insufferably parochial. European and American thinkers, in so many ways so diverse, have been from the time of their Greek forebears virtually as one in their provincial assurance that such ontological, cosmological and theological speculation as is worthy of their notice is a product of their Western culture.

The philosophy of Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) affords a notable case in point. In the world of modern Muslim thought he stands alone. His *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* aspires to a place akin to that occupied by al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* ("Revivification of the Religious Sciences"). His philosophical poetry is regarded by many Muslim scholars as a worthy postscript to the *Divan* and *Mathnawi* of Jalaluddin Rumi."

This echoes the views expressed earlier during the century by the French metaphysician René Guénon as a prelude to his masterly study *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*.<sup>23</sup> Guénon had termed it "The Classical Prejudice" leading to "intellectual myopia". The attitude manifested itself in a different mode after the advent of Modernity when the Western cultural imagination turned away after its encounter with the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. This inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities and was responsible for the withdrawal of the Western thinkers of Enlightenment from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> It was

specifically a Modern phenomenon as, during the Middle Ages, despite the outwards conflicts and even protracted wars, intellectual exchange had continued at a deeper and more meaningful level. In this regard it is useful to investigate how the West engaged with the idea and practice of tolerance as it had manifested in other religions and cultures and how does it relate to the historical trajectory through which it became established in the West.

### **TOLERANCE— RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR**

Tolerance is a multi-faceted concept comprising moral, psychological, social, legal, political and religious dimensions. The dimension of tolerance addressed by this essay is specifically religious tolerance, such as this principle finds expression within the Islamic tradition, and how it came to be enshrined in the Western thought after the Enlightenment. Further to that we would try to look at the shared legacy of the idea that suffered a diverse destiny in the West. Religious tolerance can be defined in terms of a positive spiritual predisposition towards the religious Other, a predisposition fashioned by a vision of the divinely-willed diversity of religious communities. If the diversity of religions is seen to be an expression of the will of God,<sup>25</sup> then the inevitable differences between the religions will be not only tolerated but also celebrated: tolerated on the outward, legal and formal plane, celebrated on the inward, cultural and spiritual plane. As is the case with secular tolerance, here also one will encounter a positive and open-minded attitude, one capable of stimulating policies and laws of a tolerant nature towards the religious Other, but the root of this attitude derives from a principle going beyond the secular domain: the tolerant attitude emerges as the consequence of a kaleidoscopic vision of unfolding divine revelations, a vision which elicits profound respect for the religions of the Other, rather than reluctantly, begrudgingly or condescendingly granting mere toleration.

Tolerance born of a divinely ordained imperative cannot but engender respect for the religious Other. But the converse does not hold: one can be tolerant in a secular sense outwardly and legally, without this being accompanied by sincere respect for the religion of the Other. Moreover, the purely secular approach to tolerance carries with it the risk of falling into a corrosive relativism of the 'anything goes' variety. It can lead to the normativity and particularity of one's own faith being diluted, if not sacrificed, for the sake of an abstracted and artificial social construct.

The Islamic tradition, in principle as well as in practice, provides compelling answers to many questions pertaining to the relationship

between religious tolerance and the practice of one's own faith. The lessons drawn from the Islamic tradition reveal that tolerance of the Other is in fact integral to the practice of Islam— it is not some optional extra, some cultural luxury, and still less, something one needs to import from some other tradition. This being said, one needs to take note of an irony: the essential sources of the Islamic faith reveal a sacred vision of diversity and difference, plurality and indeed of universality, which is unparalleled among world scriptures; the practice of contemporary Muslim states, however, not to mention many vociferous extra-state groups and actors, falls lamentably short of the current standards of tolerance set by the secular West. In consequence, it is hardly surprising that many argue that what the Muslim world needs in order to become more tolerant is to learn to become more modern and secular, and less traditional and 'visionary'. This kind of argument, however, ignoring and belittling the vast treasury of ethical and spiritual resources within the Islamic tradition, will succeed only in making Muslims more, rather than less, intolerant, by provoking defensive backlashes. But we would come back later to the issue of this apparently more intelligible demand that we must pass through an Enlightenment, voiced by the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn when he wrote that "Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam."<sup>26</sup>

A more fruitful approach would be to encourage an honest acknowledgement by Muslims that, as regards the practice of religious tolerance, the secular West has indeed set high standards, albeit at the price of a corrosive relativism, a price which is becoming increasingly apparent to many with the passage of time. Instead of being seen as contrary to the Islamic vision, however, such tolerant codes of conduct can be seen as formal expressions of the universal principle of tolerance inhering in the vision of Islam itself. In this sacred vision the plurality of paths to the One is viewed as a reflection of the infinitude of the One; tolerance of diversity and difference on the human plane thus flows as a moral consequence of this divinely willed plurality, becoming thereby not just a social ethic, but also an expression of the wisdom of the One, being ordained first 'from above', and then here below. Tolerance within the framework of a divinely ordained schema expresses both an obligation and a right: a moral obligation to permit people of different faiths to manifest their own specific ways of embodying and radiating these universal values, and the spiritual right to benefit from the specific manifestations of these universal values oneself. This accords with the very purpose of diversity as envisioned by the

Qur'an: 'O mankind, We have created you male and female, and We have made you into tribes and nations in order that you might come to know one another. Truly, in the sight of God, the most honoured amongst you is the most pious amongst you' (49:13).

The Prophet was asked: 'which religion is most loved by God?' His answer can be seen as a succinct commentary on the above verse. Instead of referring to such and such a religion, he highlights the key character trait which should be infused into the soul by all religions, or by religion as such; whichever religion is most successful in producing this trait becomes 'the most beloved' religion to God: "The primordial, generously tolerant faith" (*al-hanafiyya al-samba*). This strongly authenticated saying highlights the centrality of tolerance to the religious endeavour as such; it also implies, as does verse 49:13, the absolute equality of all believers, the sole permissible hierarchy within humanity being that based on intrinsic piety, not on such extrinsic factors as gender or affiliation to tribe or nation, race or religion. Given this view of equality on the human plane, and the Islamic belief in universal and cyclical revelation—no community being deprived of authentic divine revelation and guidance—intolerance of the Other is reprehensible both morally and spiritually.

### ***Tolerant Islam or the Liberal West? Which came first?***

Before directly addressing the principle and practice of tolerance in Islam, let us ask ourselves the question as to what is the provenance of the secular concept of tolerance in the West, for this provides some important—and ironic—lessons in this domain. In 1689 John Locke, one of the founding fathers of modern liberal thought, wrote a famous text, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration'. This letter is widely viewed as instrumental in the process by which the ethical value of religious tolerance was transformed into a universal ethical imperative, as far as individual conscience is concerned, and into a legal obligation, incumbent upon the upholders of political authority, as far as the state is concerned. It is evident from this letter that Locke was deeply struck by the contrast between tolerant 'barbarians'— the Muslim Ottomans— and violently intolerant Christians. The contrast was compounded by the fact that Muslims exercised more tolerance towards non-Muslims than Christians did to each other, let alone non-Christians. In his letter, Locke ruefully reflected on the absurdity that Calvinists and Armenians were free to practice their faith if they lived in the Muslim Ottoman Empire, but not in Christian Europe: would the Turks not 'silently stand by and laugh to see with what inhuman cruelty Christians thus rage against Christians?'



Locke passionately proclaimed the need for ‘universal tolerance’, whatever one’s religious beliefs, and, indeed, in the prevailing Christian climate, *despite* one’s beliefs. Following on logically from this secular principle of tolerance was the right for non-Christians to live unmolested in the state of England, and be accorded full civil and political rights: ‘...neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion.’ This strict separation between religion and politics, church and state, so often viewed only as part of the evolutionary trajectory of western secularization must also be seen in the light of the historical interface between mutually intolerant Christian states and denominations, on the one hand, and a vibrantly tolerant Muslim polity, on the other. The current unquestioned right of freedom of religious belief and worship in the Western world is thus not simply a corollary of secular thought; it is a principle inspired, at least in part, by the influence of Islam.

The spectacle of Muslim Ottoman tolerance was something to which Christendom was used: ‘Better the turban of the Sultan than the mitre of the Pope’, was a well-worn saying among Eastern Orthodox Christians, acutely aware of the fact that their rights were more secure under the Ottomans than under their Catholic co-religionists. Ottoman conquest was followed almost without exception by Islamic tolerance of the conquered peoples. ‘Tolerance’, according to (Reverend) Dr Susan Ritchie, ‘was a matter of Ottoman policy and bureaucratic structure, and an expression of the Ottoman interpretation of Islam, which was in most instances stunningly liberal and cosmopolitan.’ She argues convincingly that this Ottoman tolerance decisively influenced the process leading to the famous Edict of Torda in 1568, issued by King John Sigismund of Transylvania (which was under Ottoman suzerainty), an edict hailed by western historians as expressing ‘the first European policy of expansive religious toleration.’<sup>27</sup> It is thus hardly surprising that Norman Daniel should allow himself to make the simple—and, for many, startling—claim: ‘The notion of toleration in Christendom was *borrowed* from Muslim practice’ (emphasis added).<sup>28</sup>

Ottoman tolerance of the Jews provides an illuminating contrast with the anti-Semitism of Christendom, which resulted in the regular pogroms and ‘ethnic cleansing’ by which the medieval Christian world was stained. Many Jews fleeing from persecution in central Europe would have received letters like the following, written by Rabbi Isaac Tzarfati, who reached the Ottomans just before their capture of Constantinople in 1453, replying to those Jews of central Europe who were calling out for help: ‘Listen, my brethren, to the

counsel I will give you. I too was born in Germany and studied Torah with the German rabbis. I was driven out of my native country and came to the Turkish land, which is blessed by God and filled with all good things. Here I found rest and happiness ... Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes, and our commerce is free and unhindered ... every one of us lives in peace and freedom. Here the Jew is not compelled to wear a yellow hat as a badge of shame, as is the case in Germany, where even wealth and great fortune are a curse for the Jew because he therewith arouses jealousy among the Christians ... Arise, my brethren, gird up your loins, collect your forces, and come to us. Here you will be free of your enemies, here you will find rest ...<sup>29</sup>

At the very same time as the Christian West was indulging in periodic anti-Jewish pogroms, the Jews were experiencing what some Jewish historians themselves have termed a kind of 'golden age' under Muslim rule. As Erwin Rosenthal writes, 'The Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more formative and positive time in our long and chequered history than that under the empire of Islam.' One particularly rich episode in this 'golden age' was experienced by the Jews of Muslim Spain. As has been abundantly attested by historical records, the Jews enjoyed not just freedom from oppression, but also an extraordinary revival of cultural, religious, theological and mystical creativity. Such great Jewish luminaries as Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol wrote their philosophical works in Arabic, and were fully 'at home' in Muslim Spain. With the expulsion, murder or forced conversion of all Muslims and Jews following the *reconquista* of Spain—brought to completion with the fall of Granada in 1492—it was to the Ottomans that the exiled Jews turned for refuge and protection. They were welcomed in Muslim lands throughout north Africa, joining the settled and prosperous Jewish communities already there.

As for Christians under Muslim rule in Spain, we have the following interesting contemporary testimony to the practice of Muslim tolerance, from within the Christian community itself. In the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century embassies were exchanged between the court of Otto I of Germany and court of Cordoba. One such delegation was led by John of Gorze in 953 who met the resident bishop of Cordoba, who explained to him, how the Christians survived:<sup>30</sup>

We have been driven to this by our sins, to be subjected to the rule of the pagans. We are forbidden by the Apostle's words to resist the civil power. Only one cause of solace is left to us, that in the depths of such

a great calamity, they do not forbid us to practise our own faith ... For the time being, then, we keep the following counsel: that provided no harm is done to our religion, we obey them in all else, and do their commands in all that does not affect our faith.

Even so fierce a critic of contemporary Islam as Bernard Lewis cannot but confirm the facts of history as regards the true character of Muslim-Jewish relations until recent times. In his book, *The Jews of Islam*, he writes that even though there was a certain level of discrimination against Jews and Christians under Muslim rule, 'Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in reconquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe.'<sup>31</sup> This pattern of tolerance characterised the nature of Muslim rule vis-à-vis Jews and Christians until modern times, with very minor exceptions. As the Jewish scholar Mark Cohen notes: 'The Talmud was burned in Paris, not in Cairo or Baghdad ... Staunch Muslim opposition to polytheism convinced Jewish thinkers like Maimonides of Islam's unimpeachable monotheism. This essentially 'tolerant' view of Islam echoed Islam's own respect for the Jewish "people of the Book".'<sup>32</sup>

### *Whence the sacred vision of Islam?*

The intrinsic nature of the Muslim polity is derived from the Prophet's embodiment of the Qur'anic revelation. His acts of statesmanship should not be seen in isolation as a series of historical events, but as a series of symbolic acts which, more powerfully than words, uphold the inviolability of the religious rights of the Other and the necessity of exercising a generous tolerance in regard to the Other. The seminal and most graphic expression of this sacred vision inspiring the kind of tolerance witnessed throughout Muslim history is given to us in the following well-attested episode in the life of the Prophet. In the ninth year after the Hijra (631), a prominent Christian delegation from Najrān, an important centre of Christianity in the Yemen, came to engage the Prophet in theological debate in Medina. The main point of contention was the nature of Christ: was he one of the messengers of God or the unique Son of God? What is important for our purposes is not the disagreements voiced, nor the means by which the debate was resolved, but the fact that when these Christians requested to leave the city to perform their liturgy, the Prophet invited them to accomplish their rites in his own

mosque. According to Ibn Ishaq, who gives the standard account of this remarkable event, the Christians in question performed the Byzantine Christian rites.<sup>33</sup> This means that they were enacting some form of the rites which incorporated the fully-developed Trinitarian theology of the Orthodox councils, emphasising the definitive creed of the divine sonship of Christ—doctrines explicitly criticised in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, the Prophet allowed the Christians to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. Disagreement on the plane of dogma is one thing, tolerance—indeed encouragement—of the enactment of that dogma is another.

One should also mention in this context the tolerance that is inscribed into the first Muslim constitution, that of Medina. In this historic document a pluralistic polity is configured. The right to freedom of worship was assumed, given the unprejudiced recognition of all three religious groups who were party to the agreement: Muslims, Jews and polytheists—the latter indeed comprising the majority at the time the constitution was drawn up. Each group enjoyed unfettered religious and legal autonomy, and the Jews, it should be noted, were not required at this stage to pay any kind of poll-tax. The Muslims were indeed recognised as forming a distinct group within the polity, but this did not compromise the principle of mutual defence which was at the root of the agreement: Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.<sup>34</sup>

To sum, the record of tolerance in Muslim history must surely be seen as the fruit of the prophetic paradigm, which in turn derives from and is a commentary upon, the vision revealed by the Qur'an, to which we should now turn. Notwithstanding the many verses critical of earlier religious traditions, the fundamental message of the Qur'an as regards all previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse in this regard is: *'We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein you differed'* (5:48).

This verse, supplemented by a multitude of other proof texts (given in the endnotes), establishes four crucial principles that

enshrine the Qur'anic Vision which both fashion and substantiate an open-minded approach to all religions and their adherents and inculcates the attitude that if God is the ultimate source of the different rites of the religions, no one set of rites can be legitimately excluded from the purview of authentic religion. :

- the Qur'an confirms and protects all divine revelations;<sup>35</sup>
- the very plurality of these revelations is the result of a divine will for diversity on the plane of human communities;<sup>36</sup>
- this diversity of revelations and plurality of communities is intended to stimulate a healthy 'competition' or mutual enrichment in the domain of 'good works';<sup>37</sup>
- differences of opinion are inevitable consequences of the very plurality of meanings embodied in diverse revelations; these differences are to be tolerated on the human plane, and will be finally resolved in the Hereafter.<sup>38</sup>

In our times, the secular principle of separation between church and state derives much of its legitimacy from the religious tolerance which fidelity to these principles fosters and protects. As stated earlier, this cannot be disputed on empirical grounds. However, what must be recognised and resisted is the temptation to universalise the particular historical trajectory by which tolerance became established in the West, and apply (or impose – as observed in the representative trend manifesting in the Mr. Fortuyn's observation) this trajectory normatively to the Muslim world. Political analysts are fond of pointing to examples of religious intolerance in the contemporary Muslim world and attribute this absence of tolerance to the 'backwardness' of Islam, and in particular to the insistence by Muslims that religion must dominate and fashion the whole of life, that restoring God to the public and the private sphere is non-negotiable and essential. This refusal to separate 'mosque' from 'state', such analysts conclude, is one of the main reasons why the Muslim world lags behind the West as regards both the principle and practice of religious tolerance.

This type of analysis is not only simplistic and erroneous; it also obscures an irony at once historical and theological. The principle of religious tolerance has historically been one of the hallmarks of Muslim society, right up to its decline in the pre-modern period– a decline accelerated by the assault of western imperialism, mimetic industrialism, and corrosive consumerism, all of which diminished radically the spiritual 'sap' of the Islamic tradition, and thereby the ethics of tolerance and compassion. In contrast, the *intolerance* which

characterised Christendom for much of its history only began to be 'deconstructed' in this same period, with the advent of western secularism. In other words, the rise of religious tolerance in the West appears to be correlated to the diminution of the influence of Christian values in public life in the modern period; conversely, in the Muslim world, it is the decline of the influence of Islamic values that has engendered that peculiar inferiority complex of which religious intolerance is a major symptom. Through the emasculation of this spiritual heritage, all sorts of imported ideological counterfeits— from apologetic liberal Islam to militant radical Islamism— have been manufactured in an effort to fill the vacuum, most of them appearing as the desperate but impotent reflexes of a decaying religious form. In such a situation, what is required is a return to the spirit of the tradition, not another form of mimesis; it is therefore highly ironic that Muslims are being called upon to follow the path of secularisation in order to become more tolerant.

Rather, Muslims ought to be invited to become aware of the tolerance which truly characterises the spirit—and the history—of the Islamic tradition; to use this tradition as the yard-stick by which to critically gauge contemporary Muslim conduct and attitudes; to strive to revive and revalorise the principles of tolerance, diversity and pluralism which are enshrined at the very heart of this tradition; and to realise that tolerance is 'neither of the East nor of the West': no religion or culture can claim a monopoly on this universal human ethic. For Muslims, then, being tolerant of the religious Other does not require imitating any philosophical teachings on tolerance the Western thought has to offer, but rather returning to the moral and spiritual roots of their own tradition, while benefiting from and acknowledging the positive aspects of practical tolerance enacted by western nations in the realms of public law, human rights and political governance.<sup>39</sup>

### **Shared Legacy: Diverse Destinies!**

The last remarks bring us to consider the question that we evoked with reference to the remarks of Pim Fortuyn.<sup>40</sup> Mr. Fortuyn's views have generated many debates in the Islamic communities in the West and even reverberate in the Islamic world where the question has gained space in the prevalent discourse. There are arguments in defence and responses that challenge the argument but the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn remains with us. Do we have to pass through his laundromat to be made internally white, as it were, to have an authentic and honoured place of belonging at the table of the modern reality? Islam has a great history of universalism, that is

to say, that Islam does not limit itself to the uplift of any given section of humanity, but rather announces a desire to transform the *entire* human family. This is, if you like, its Ishmaelite uniqueness: the religions that spring from Isaac (*a.s.*), are, in our understanding, an extension of Hebrew and Occidental particularity, while Islam is universal. Islam's civilizational eminence stemmed from a spectacular plenitude. Of the other religions of the pre-Enlightenment world, only Buddhism rivaled Islam in massively encompassing a range of cultures; however Islam, uncontroversially, was the foundation for a still wider range and variety of cultural worlds.<sup>41</sup> Has this triumphant demonstration of Islam's universalism come to an end? Perhaps the greatest single issue exercising the world today is the following: is the engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles, cannot manage? The current agreement between zealots on both sides – Islamic and unbelieving– that Islam and Western modernity can have no conversation, and cannot inhabit each other, seems difficult given traditional Islamic assurances about the universal potential of revelation. The increasing numbers of individuals who identify themselves as entirely Western, and entirely Muslim, demonstrate that the arguments against the continued ability of Islam to be inclusively universal are simply false.

Yet the question, the big new Eastern Question, will not go away this easily. Palpably, there are millions of Muslims who are at ease somewhere within the spectrum of the diverse possibilities of Westernness. We need, however, a theory to match this practice. Is the accommodation real? What is the theological or *fiqh* status of this claim to an overlap? Can Islam really square this biggest of all historical circles, or must it now fail, and retreat into impoverished and hostile marginality, as history passes it by?

The same argument underlies the claim that Muslims cannot inhabit the West, or– as successful participants– the Western-dominated global reality, because Islam has not passed through a reformation. This is a tiresome and absent-minded claim and is often advanced by those who are simply cannot troubled to read their *own* history, let alone the history of Islam. A reformation, that is to say, a bypass operation which avoids the clogged arteries of medieval history and seeks to refresh us with the lifeblood of the scriptures themselves, is precisely what is today underway among those movements and in those places which the West finds most intimidating. The Islamic world is now in the throes of its own reformation, and our Calvins and Cromwells are proving no more tolerant and flexible than their European predecessors.<sup>42</sup> A

reformation, then, is a bad thing to ask us for, if you would like us to be more pliant. But the apparently more intelligible demand, which is that we must pass through an Enlightenment, articulated in the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn's remarks cited earlier remains with us.<sup>43</sup> In this regard the case of the Netherlands is especially pertinent because it was, until very recently, a model of liberalism and multiculturalism. Indeed, modern conceptions of religious toleration may be said to have originated among Dutch intellectuals. Without wishing to sound the alarm, it is evident that if Holland can adopt an implicitly inquisitorial attitude to Islam, there is no reason why other states should not do likewise. Fortuyn, a highly-educated and liberal Islamophobe, was convinced that Islam cannot square the circle. He would say that the past genius of Islam in adapting itself to cultures from Senegal to Sumatra cannot be extended into our era, because the rules of that game no longer apply. Success today demands membership of a global reality, which means signing up to the terms of its philosophy.<sup>44</sup> How should Islam answer this charge? The answer is, of course, that 'Islam' can't. The religion's strength stems in large degree from its internal diversity. Different readings of the scriptures attract different species of humanity. There will be no unified Islamic voice answering Fortuyn's interrogation. The more useful question is: *who* should answer the charge? What sort of Muslim is best equipped to speak for us, and to defeat his logic?

Fortuyn's error was to impose a Christian squint on Islam. As a practising Catholic, he imported assumptions about the nature of religious authority that ignore the multi-centred reality of Islam. On doctrine, we try to be united - but he is not interested in our doctrine. On *fiqh*, we are substantially diverse. Even in the medieval period, one of the great moral and methodological triumphs of the Muslim mind was the confidence that a variety of *madhhabs* could conflict formally, but could all be acceptable to God.<sup>45</sup> Fortuyn and others who share his views work with the assumption that Islam is an ideology<sup>46</sup> and given the nature of the Islam-West encounter the emergence of 'ideological Islam' was, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, entirely predictable. Everything at that time was ideology. Spirituality seemed to have ended, and postmodernism was not yet a twinkle in a Parisian eye. In fact, the British historian John Gray goes so far as to describe the process which Washington describes as the 'war on terror' as an internal Western argument which has nothing to do with traditional Islam. As he puts it: "The ideologues of political Islam are western voices, no less than Marx or Hayek. The struggle with radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel."<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the irony remains. We are represented by



the unrepresentative, and the West sees in us a mirror image of its less attractive potentialities. Western Muslim theologians as well as many Muslim theologians living in the West—René Guénon, S. H. Nasr, Tim Winter, Tage Lindbom, Roger Garaudy to name just a few—frequently point out that the movements which seek to represent Islam globally, or in Western minority situations, are typically movements which arose as reactions against Western political hegemony that themselves internalised substantial aspects of Western political method. In Europe, Muslim community leaders who are called upon to justify Islam in the face of recent terrorist activities are ironically often individuals who subscribe to ideologised forms of Islam which adopt dimensions of Western modernity in order to secure an anti-Western profile. It is no surprise that such leaders arouse the suspicion of the likes of Pim Fortuyn, or, indeed, a remarkably wide spectrum of commentators across the political spectrum.

Islam's universalism, however, is not well-represented by the advocates of *movement* Islam. Islamic universalism is represented by the great bulk of ordinary mosque-going Muslims who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the local and global reality. One could argue, against Fortuyn, that Muslim communities are far more open to the West than vice-versa, and know far more about it. There is no equivalent desire in the West to learn from and integrate into other cultures.<sup>48</sup> Islam, we will therefore insist, is more flexible than the West. Where they are intelligently applied, our laws and customs, mediated through the due instruments of *ijtihad*, have been reshaped substantially by encounter with the Western juggernaut, through faculties such as the concern for public interest, or *urf*—customary legislation. Western law and society, by contrast, have not admitted significant emendation at the hands of another culture for many centuries. From our perspective, then, it can seem that it is the West, not the Islamic world, which stands in need of reform in a more pluralistic direction. It claims to be open, while we are closed, but in reality, on the ground, seems closed, while we have been open. There is force to this defense but does it help us answer the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn? Historians would probably argue that since history cannot repeat itself, the demand that Islam experience an Enlightenment is strange, and that if the task be attempted, it cannot remotely guarantee an outcome analogous to that experienced by Europe. If honest and erudite enough, they may also recognize that the Enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal

European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought, and particularly the Islamized version of Aristotle which, via Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalized dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of credal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain.<sup>49</sup> For the humanities, George Makdisi traces European humanism to Islamic antecedents<sup>50</sup> saying that “the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the reception of both movements, scholasticism and humanism, from classical Islam by the Christian Latin West.” The implication being that without Islam, the medieval world might have endured forever. However Westerners, unlike the Moors of Cordova, proved less able to tolerate diversity or fecundation by the Other, and their own Renaissance and Enlightenment only added to the European’s absolute sense of superiority over other cultures, a prejudice that was augmented further by an escalating positivism that finally dethroned God. Garaudy thus concludes that only by radically challenging its own version of Enlightenment and accepting a Muslim version, rooted in what he calls the Third Heritage (the first two being the Classics and the Bible), will the West save itself from its “deadly hegemonic adventure”, and “its suicidal model of growth and civilization.”<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Christian and Jewish Enlightenments of the eighteenth century did not move Europe in a religious, still less an Islamic direction. Instead, they moved outside the Moorish paradigm to produce a disenchantment, a desacralising of the world which opened the gates for two enormous transformations in human experience. One of these has been the subjugation of nature to the will (or more usually the lower desires) of man. The consequences for the environment, and even for the sustainable habitability of our planet, are looking increasingly disturbing. There is certainly an oddness about the Western desire to convert the Third World to a high-consumption market economy, when it is certain that if the world were to reach American levels of fossil-fuel consumption, global warming would soon render the planet entirely uninhabitable.

The second dangerous consequence of ‘Enlightenment’, as Muslims see it, is the replacement of religious autocracy and sacred kingship with either a totalitarian political order, or with a democratic liberal arrangement that has no fail-safe resistance to moving in a totalitarian direction.<sup>52</sup> The West is loath to refer to this possibility

in its makeup and believes that Srebrenica, or Mr Fortuyn, are aberrations, not a recurrent possibility. Muslims, however, surely have the right to express deep unease about the demand to submit to an Enlightenment project that seems to have produced so much darkness as well as light. Iqbal, identifying himself with the character Zinda-Rud in his *Javid-name*, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'raj: *Inghelab-i Rus u Alman dide amr*: 'I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany!'<sup>53</sup> This in a great, final crying-out to God.

Another aspect of the question needs attention here. Western intellectuals now speak of post-modernism as an end of Enlightenment reason. Hence the new Muslim question becomes: why jump into the laundromat if European thinkers have themselves turned it off? Is the Third World to be brought to heel by importing only Europe's yesterdays?<sup>54</sup> Iqbal represents a very different tradition which insists that Islam is only itself when it recognizes that authenticity arises from recognizing the versatility of classical Islam, rather than taking any single reading of the scriptures as uniquely true. *Ijtihad*, after all, is scarcely a modern invention!

An age of decadence, whether or not framed by an Enlightenment, is an age of extremes, and the twentieth century was precisely that. Islam has been Westernized enough, it sometimes appears, to have joined that logic. We are either neutralized by a supposedly benign Islamic liberalism that in practice allows nothing distinctively Islamic to leave the home or the mosque— an Enlightenment-style privatization of religion that abandons the world to the morality of the market leaders and the demagogues. Or we fall back into the sensual embrace of extremism, justifying our refusal to deal with the real world by dismissing it as absolute evil, as *kufri*, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.<sup>55</sup> Revelation, as always, requires the middle way. Extremism, in any case, never succeeds even on its own terms. It usually repels more people from religion than it holds within it. Attempts to reject all of global modernity simply cannot succeed, and have not succeeded anywhere. To borrow the words of Tim Winter, "A more sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world."<sup>56</sup> In response Basit Koshul has very pertinently observed:<sup>57</sup>

[It] means that the dissent from the Enlightenment can only be "within the limits of reason alone". It also means that the prophetic witness will have to play the indispensable role of affirming witness from outside the Enlightenment tradition—

affirming some of the deepest aspirations of Enlightenment ethos from the Qur'anic perspective. .... I'd like to explicitly articulate the logic underpinning both of the approaches offered above with respect to the ultimate goal of Islam in its encounter with the modern West is not to critique-condemn-replace but to redeem-reform-embrace. ... The critique is a means towards redeeming, which itself is a prelude to reforming with the ultimate goal being the embracing of the afflicted paradigm/event.<sup>58</sup>

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

It should not be hard to see where we naturally fit. The gaping hole in the Enlightenment, pointed out by the postmodern theologians and by more skeptical but still anxious minds, was the Enlightenment's inability to form a stable and persuasive ground for virtue and hence for what it has called 'citizenship'. David Hume expressed the problem as follows:<sup>59</sup>

If the reason be asked of that obedience which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer: *Because society could not otherwise subsist*; and this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, *Because we should keep our word*. But besides that, nobody, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer; besides this, say, you find yourself embarrassed when it is asked, *Why we are bound to keep our word?* Nor can you give any answer but what would immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance.

But why are we bound to keep our word? Why need we respect the moral law? Religion seems to answer this far more convincingly than any secular ethic.<sup>60</sup> Religion offers a solution to this fatal weakness.

Applied with wisdom, it provides a fully adequate reason for virtue and an ability to produce cultural and political leaders who embody it themselves. Of course, it is all too often applied improperly, and there is something of the Promethean arrogance and hubris of the *philosophes* in the radical insistence that the human subject be enthroned in authority over scriptural interpretation, without a due prelude of initiation, love, and self-naughting. Yet the failure of the Enlightenment paradigm, as invoked by the secular elites in the Muslim world, to deliver moral and efficient government and cultural guidance, indicates that the solution *must* be religious. Religious aberrations do not discredit the principle they aberrantly affirm.

What manner of Islam may most safely undertake this task? It is no accident that the overwhelming majority of Western Muslim thinkers have been drawn into the religion by the appeal of Sufism. To us, the ideological redefinitions of Islam are hardly more impressive than they are to the many European xenophobes who take them as normative. We need a form of religion that elegantly and persuasively squares the circle, rather than insisting on a conflictual model that is unlikely to damage the West as much as Islam. A purely non-spiritual reading of Islam, lacking the vertical dimension, tends to produce only liberals or zealots; and both have proved irrelevant to our needs.

Are we to conclude that modern Islam, so often sympathetic to the Enlightenment's claims, and in its Islamist version one of their most powerful instantiations, has been deeply mistaken? The totalitarian forms of Enlightenment reason which recurred throughout the twentieth century have discredited it in the eyes of many; and are now less dangerous only because postmodernism seems to have abolished so many of the Enlightenment's key beliefs.<sup>61</sup> If the ideal of freedom is now based less on ideas of inalienable natural rights than on the notion that all truth is relative, then perhaps mainstream Islamist thinking will need to unhitch itself more explicitly from the broadly Western paradigms which it accepted for most of the twentieth century. Yet the relation Islam/Enlightenment seems predicated on simplistic definitions of both. Islamism may be an Enlightenment project, but conservative Sufism (for instance) is probably not. Conversely, even without adopting a postmodern perspective we are not so willing today to assume a necessary antithesis between tradition and reason.<sup>62</sup> The way forward, probably, is to recognize that Islam genuinely converges with Enlightenment concerns on some issues; while on other matters, notably the Enlightenment's individualism and its

increasingly Promethean confidence in humanity's autonomous capacities, it is likely to demur radically.

What matters about Islam is that it did not produce the modern world. If modernity ends in a technologically-induced holocaust, then survivors will probably hail the religion's wisdom in not authoring something similar.<sup>63</sup> If, however, it survives, and continues to produce a global monoculture where the past is forgotten, and where international laws and customs are increasingly restrictive of cultural difference, then Islam is likely to remain the world's great heresy. The Ishmaelite alternative is rejected. But what if Ishmael actually wishes to be rejected, since the one who is doing the rejecting has ended up creating a world without God? Grounded in our stubbornly immobile liturgy and doctrine, we Ishmaelites should serve the invaluable, though deeply resented, function of a culture which would like to be an Other, even if that is no longer quite possible!

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> *Javid Nama in Kulliyat i Iqbal*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 672-673.

<sup>2</sup> He received the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1913. The Preface written by W. B. Yeats to the anthology of Tagore highlighted the mellowness of his voice and the representation of the Indians as a humble and harmless race.

<sup>3</sup> Whose "Love Song of G. Alfred Prufrock" appeared in 1915. It was a view of pessimism and boredom.

<sup>4</sup> His *Secrets of the Self* appeared in Persian the same year, although his Urdu poem had been common recitals in India for more than ten years by then. His book was translated into English in 1920. It was clear that out of these three new voices, his was the voice that the west was going to ignore. Ironically, this was the only voice in that age which was inviting its listeners to get real, and do something to change the world to a better place.

<sup>5</sup> *Zubur i 'Ajam*, in *Kulliyat i Iqbal*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 376.

<sup>6</sup> **I am... kind.** By "the crescent and the cross" is meant the historic confrontation between Islam and Christianity that took the form of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Iqbal is saying that, unlike many other Muslims, who remain mentally imprisoned in the past, allowing their thought and action to be determined by certain crucial events of former times, he is more concerned about the momentous developments taking place in the present age. Iqbal does not specify what he means by "an ordeal of a different kind" (*fitnah-i digari*)—whether he means a particular major development, like communism, or whether he uses the singular "ordeal" in a generic sense to refer to several major and decisive developments

taking place on the world stage. The main point of the verse, in any case, is that the issues of the present and the future have greater claim on one's attention than issues belonging to a past that may have no more than historical or academic importance. In the second hemistich, "the womb of time" is a translation of *damir-i ayyam*, which literally means "in the insides of time." See M. Mir, (ed.), *Iqbal-Namah*, Vol. 5, No. 3-4, Summer and Fall, 2005, p. 3-6.

<sup>7</sup> F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, reprinted, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2004, pp. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Armaghān i Hijāz*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, Persian, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 860.

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Lings, "Intellect and Reason" in *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, rpt. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988, 57-68; F. Schuon, *Gnosis Divine Wisdom* London: J. Murray, 1978, 93-99; S. H. Nasr, "Knowledge and its Desacralization" in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 1-64; Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 60-95. Also see his *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> See René Guenon, "Individualism" in *Crisis of the Modern World*, (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981, 51-65. Also see Social Chaos" in the same document.

<sup>11</sup> less anthropomorphically described in Plotinus's wording

<sup>12</sup> As John Avis and William Provine have said,

<sup>13</sup> This important point is not generally recognized, so I shall spell it out. The death-knell to modernity, which had science as its source and hope, was sounded with the realization that despite its power in limited regions, six things slip through its controlled experiments in the way sea slips through the nets of fishermen:

1. *Values*. Science can deal with descriptive and instrumental values, but not with intrinsic and normative ones.

2. *Meanings*. Science can work with cognitive meanings, but not with existential meanings (Is X meaningful?), or ultimate ones (What is the meaning of life?).

3. *Purposes*. Science can handle teleonomy—purposiveness in organisms— but not teleology, final causes.

4. *Qualities*. Quantities science is good at, but not qualities.

5. *The invisible and the immaterial*. It can work with invisibles that are rigorously entailed by matter's behaviour (the movements of iron filings that require magnetic fields to account for them, e.g.) but not with others.

6. *Our superiors, if such exist*. This limitation does not prove that beings greater than ourselves exist, but it does leave the question open, for "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence".

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (referred to as *Reconstruction*, here after), Iqbal Academy Pakistan/Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Gellner defines Postmodernism as relativism—"relativismus über Alles" (*Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*)— but relativism is not an easy position to defend, so postmoderns do everything they can to avoid that label; Clifford Geertz's "anti-antirelativism" is a case in point. The T-shirts that blossomed on the final day of a six-week, 1987 NEH Institute probably tell the story. Superimposed on a slashed circle, their logo read, "No cheap relativism". By squirming, postmoderns can parry crude relativisms, but sophisticated relativism is still relativism. Postmoderns resist that conclusion, however, so I shall stay with their own self-characterization.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984, pp. xxiv, 3ff.

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality*, Boston and Shaftsbury, Shambala, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> No textbook in science has ever included things that are intrinsically greater than human beings. Bigger, of course, and wielding more physical power, but not superior in the full sense of that term which includes virtues, such as intelligence, compassion, and bliss.

<sup>19</sup> “Shaykh i Maktab” *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, Urdu, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 494

<sup>20</sup> The views about the prevailing human predicament converged. Fresh “infusions” were needed. The opinions about the nature and origin of these fresh “infusions” that could rectify or change it for the better were, however, divergent. Some of Iqbal’s cotemporaries tried to find an alternative from within the dominant paradigm. Others suggested the possibility of a search for these fresh “infusions” in a different direction: different cultures, other civilizations, religious doctrines, sapiential traditions. What could it be?

<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that when in her last interview Rebecca West was asked to name the dominant mood of our time, she replied, “A desperate search for a pattern.” The search is desperate because it seems futile to look for a pattern when reality has become, in Roland Barth’s vivid image, kaleidoscopic. With every tick of the clock the pieces of experience come down in new array.

<sup>22</sup> In his 1966 article, referring to Iqbal, Robert Whitemore, “Iqbal’s Panentheism” had remarked, if we seek through the pages of most modern European and American philosophy for a mention of his name, Iqbal is unknown even to the compilers of philosophical dictionaries and encyclopaedias. (One prominent exception was Hartshorne & Reese’s *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 294-97. The situation has changed since. In the last few decades, Iqbal has been studied by a number of scholars in the West. And, to be sure, he is now being mentioned and discussed in philosophical encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks published in Western countries. For example, in Robert L. Arrington’s edited volume *A Companion to the Philosophers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), Iqbal is one of the eight philosophers included in the section on Islamic and Jewish philosophers, and he is in respectable company in Diané Collinson, Kathryn Plant, and Robert Wilkinson’s *Fifty Eastern Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> René Guenon, “The Classical Prejudice”, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, NY, 2004, p. 19. The book was originally written in French and appeared in its first English edition in 1925.

<sup>24</sup> Those interested in learning more about some of the criticisms we have in mind might begin by looking at the books cited by Lawrence E. Sullivan in his masterly study, *Icanchus Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 884-85. What he says in the passage leading up to the suggested reading applies also to Western perceptions of Islam: “One of the great disservices to our understanding of South American religions [read: Islam] has been the perception of tribal peoples [read: Muslims] as slavishly dedicated to an unchanging order revealed in the images of myth and handed down unquestioned and unmodified from one generation to the next.

This attitude accompanies the evaluation of ‘myth’ as a banal and inane narrative. Tribal peoples (representing ‘archaic’ modes of thought) childishly cling to their myths, infantile fantasies, whereas mature contemporaries jettison myths with the passage of ‘historical time’ and the entrance’ into ‘modernity.’ It would be fascinating to study these and other justifications proffered for avoiding a serious encounter with the reality of myth [read: Islamic thought] and symbolic acts.... This



is, however, not the place to carry out a history of the 'modern' ideas of myth and religion. It is enough to suggest that the Western cultural imagination turned away when it encountered the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. Doubtless this inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities. The Enlightenment, the withdrawal of Western thinkers from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge, and its intellectual follow-up coined new symbolic currency. These terms brought new meanings and new self-definition to Western culture: 'consciousness/unconsciousness,' 'primitive/civilized,' 'ethics/mores,' 'law/custom,' 'critical or reflective thought/action.'

<sup>25</sup> The fundamental message of the Qur'an as regards all previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse in this regard is: '*We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein you differed*' (5:48).

<sup>26</sup> Fortuyn's religious views are detailed in his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, published in 1997 (cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163) to celebrate Israel's fiftieth birthday. He believed that Islam, unlike his own strongly-affirmed Christianity, is a 'backward culture', with an inadequate view of God and an inbuilt hostility to European culture. He called for massive curbs on Muslim immigration, and for greater stress on Holland's Christian heritage. A prominent homosexual activist, Fortuyn also condemned Islam's opposition to same-sex marriage. Cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Ritchie, 'The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania', in *Seasons—Semi-annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute*, vol.2, no.1, pp.62, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966), p.12.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in S. A. Schleifer, 'Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History', in *The Spirit of Palestine* (Barcelona, 1994), p.8.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent—Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York/London, 2004), p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1984), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Cohen, 'Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History', in *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.38, 1986, p.135.

<sup>33</sup> A. Guillaume (Fr.) *The Life of Muhammad—A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford, 1968), pp.270-277.

<sup>34</sup> F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, 1990), vol.1, p. 217.

<sup>35</sup> 'there is no compulsion in religion' (2:256); 'Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought, for they have been wronged ... Had God not driven back some by means of others, then indeed monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques—wherein the name of God is oft-invoked—would assuredly have been destroyed (22: 39-40).

<sup>36</sup> The plurality of revelations, like the diversity of human communities, is divinely-willed, and not the result of some human contingency. Universal revelation and human diversity alike are expressions of divine wisdom. They are also signs

intimating the infinitude of the divine nature itself: *'And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know (30:22):'* Just as God is both absolutely one yet immeasurably infinite, so the human race is one in its essence, yet infinitely variegated in its forms. The *fitra*, or primordial nature, is the inalienable substance of each human being and this essence of human identity takes priority over all external forms of identity such as race and nation, culture or even religion: *'So set your purpose firmly for the faith as an original monotheist, [in accordance with] the fitra of God, by which He created mankind. There can be no altering the creation of God. That is the right religion, but most people know it not' (30:30).* The diversity of religious rites is also derived directly from God, affirmed by the following verse: *'Unto each community We have given sacred rites (mansakan) which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but summon them unto your Lord (22:67). For every community there is a Messenger (10:47). And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our message] clear to them (14:4). Truly We inspire you, as We inspired Noah, and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We bestowed unto David the Psalms; and Messengers We have mentioned to you before, and Messengers We have not mentioned to you (4:163-164). (emphasis added) And We sent no Messenger before you but We inspired him [saying]: There is no God save Me, so worship Me (21:25). Naught is said unto you [Muhammad] but what was said unto the Messengers before you (41:43).*

<sup>37</sup> The ultimate goal in such a competition between religious believers is salvation. The performance of 'good works' (*khayrat*) is intended not only to establish moral conduct on earth but also to grant access to that grace by which one attains salvation in the Hereafter. One of the key sources of religious intolerance is the exclusivist notion that one's religion, alone, grants access to salvation, all others being false religions leading nowhere. This exclusivism is summed up in the Roman Catholic formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: no salvation outside of the Church. This kind of exclusivism has no place in the Qur'anic worldview, as is clearly demonstrated by such verses as the following: *'Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2: 62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69).* The only criteria for salvation according to this verse are belief in the Absolute, and in accountability to that Absolute, conjoined to virtue in consequence of these beliefs. Given this clear expression of the universality of salvation, any lapse into the kind of religious chauvinism which feeds intolerance is impermissible. This is made clear in the following verses, which explicitly mention forms of religious exclusivism which the Muslims had encountered among various communities of the 'People of the Book': *'And they say: "None enters Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian". These are their vain desires. Say: "Bring your proof if you are truthful". Nay, but whosoever submits his purpose to God, and he is virtuous, his reward is with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2:111-112).* In other words, the Muslim is not allowed to play the game of religious polemics. Instead of responding in kind to any sort of chauvinistic claims or 'vain desires' aimed at monopolising Paradise, the Muslim is instructed to raise the dialogue to a higher level, and to call for reasoned debate: 'bring your proof'. The Qur'anic position is to affirm the universal salvific criteria of piety, accessible to all human beings, whatever be their religious affiliation. This position is further affirmed in the following verses: *'It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor with the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have its recompense ... And whoso performs good works, whether male or female, and is a believer, such*

*will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged the dint of a date-stone.* (4:123-124) One can read this verse as implying that insofar as the Muslim ‘desires’ that salvation be restricted to Muslims in the specific, communal sense, he falls into exactly the same kind of exclusivism of which the Christians and Jews stand accused. It should be noted that the very same word is used both for the ‘desires’ of the Jews and the Christians, and the ‘desires’ of the Muslims, *amaniyy* (s. *umniyya*). The logic of these verses clearly indicates that one form of religious prejudice is not to be confronted with another form of the same error, but with an objective, unprejudiced recognition of the inexorable and universal law of divine justice, a law which excludes both religious nationalism and its natural concomitant, intolerance.

<sup>38</sup> Given the fact that ‘*there is no compulsion in religion*’ (2:256), it follows that differences of opinion must be tolerated and not suppressed. This theme is not unconnected with the principle of divine mercy: just as God’s mercy is described as *encompassing all things* (7:156), so divine guidance through revelation encompasses all human communities. The Prophet is described as a ‘*mercy to the whole of creation*’ (21:107), and his character is described as merciful and kind in the Qur’an (9:128); in the traditional sources the trait which is most often used to define the essence of his personality is *hilm*, a forbearance compounded of wisdom and gentleness. The tolerance accorded to the Other by the Prophet is thus an expression not only of knowledge of the universality of revelation, but also of the mercy, love and compassion from which this universal divine will to guide and save all peoples itself springs. Seen thus, the spirit of Islamic tolerance goes infinitely beyond a merely formal toleration of the Other; it is the outward ethical form assumed by one’s conformity to the very nature of the divine, which encompasses all things ‘*in mercy and knowledge*’ (40:7). It is also a mode of emulation of the prophetic nature: ‘*Say [O Muhammad]: If you love God, follow me; God will love you*’ (3:31). To follow the Prophet means, among other things, to be gentle and lenient to all, in accordance with the *hilm* which defined his character: ‘*It was a mercy from God that you are gently disposed to them; had you been fierce and hard-hearted, they would have fled from you*’ (3:159). In regard to the disbelievers, then, the Muslim is enjoined to let them go their way unmolested, to let them believe in their own ‘religion’: ‘*Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor do you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. For you your religion, for me, mine* (109:1-6)’. Returning to the duty to deliver the message and no more, there are a number of verses to note; for example:

‘*If they submit, they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, you have no duty other than conveying the message ...* (3:20) ‘*If they are averse, We have not sent you as a guardian over them: your duty is but to convey the message* (42:48).’

<sup>39</sup> Islam teaches that tolerance, far from being the preserve of this or that religion, is a universal ethical imperative which must be infused into the moral fibre of each human being. This imperative acquires additional urgency given the fact that human society is characterised by a divinely-willed diversity of religions and cultures. Without tolerance, diversity is jeopardised; without diversity, the God-given nature of humanity is violated. If the diversity of religions and cultures is an expression of the wisdom of divine revelation, then tolerance of the differences which will always accompany that diversity becomes not just an ethical obligation to our fellow-creatures, but also a mode of respecting and reflecting the wisdom of the Creator. That wisdom is inextricably bound up with mercy, for God encompasses all things ‘*in mercy and knowledge*’ (40:7). From the point of view of the

sacred vision of Islam, tolerance is not just a noble human ethic, it is also, and above all, an invitation to participate in the compassionate wisdom of the Creator.

<sup>40</sup> A quick survey of the region would be in order here. In Norway, the 1997 election saw the sudden appearance of the anti-immigrant Progress Party of Carl Hagen, which now holds twenty-five out of a hundred and sixty-five parliamentary seats. Similar to Hagen's group is the Swiss People's Party, which commands 22.5% of the popular vote in Switzerland, and has been widely compared to the Freedom Party of Jorg Haider, which in 1999 joined the Austrian coalition government.

In Denmark, the rapidly-growing ultranationalist DPP has become the third most popular party, benefiting from widespread popular dislike of Muslims. Its folksy housewife-leader Pia Kjaersgaard opposes entry into the Eurozone, rails against 'welfare cheats', and is famous for her outbursts against Islam. 'I think the Muslims are a problem,' she stated in a recent interview. 'It's a problem in a Christian country to have too many Muslims.'

[[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/europe/2000/far\\_right/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/far_right/)]

In Britain, the same tendency has to some extent been paralleled in the recent growth of the British National Party. A cassette recording issued by the party, entitled 'Islam: A Threat to Us All: A Joint Statement by the British National Party, Sikhs and Hindus', describes itself as 'a common effort to expose and resist the innate aggression of the imperialistic ideology of Islam'. As with its Continental allies, the BNP is gaining popularity by abandoning racist language, and by attempting to forge alliances with non-Muslim Asians and Blacks. The result has been documents such as the October 2001 'Anti-Islam Supplement' of the BNP newsletter Identity, which ended with an appeal to 'Join Our Crusade'. The chairman of the BNP, Nick Griffin, wades in with discussions of 'The Islamic Monster' and the 'New Crusade for the Survival of the West'. [<http://www.bnp.org.uk/articles.html>]. In July 2001, Griffin and his skinheads polled 16% of the votes in Oldham West: the highest postwar vote for any extremist party in the UK. Nonetheless, British fascism remains less popular than most of its European counterparts. An issue to consider, no doubt, as Muslim communities ponder their response to growing British participation in schemes for European integration, and the long-term possibility of a federal European state.

To offer a final, more drastic example of how such attitudes are no longer marginal, but have penetrated the mainstream and contribute to the shaping of policy, often with disastrous results. On the outbreak of the Bosnian war, the German magazine Der Spiegel told its readers that 'Soon Europe could have a fanatical theocratic state on its doorstep.' [Cited in Andrea Lueg, 'The Perception of Islam in Western Debate', in Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg (eds), The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam, London: Pluto Press, 1995, p.9.] (The logic no doubt appealed to the thirty-eight percent of Germans polled in [Brandenburg]who recently expressed support for a far-right party's policy on 'foreigners'. [The Independent, 5 October 1999.]).

The influential American commentator R.D. Kaplan, much admired by Bill Clinton, thought that '[a] cultural curtain is descending in Bosnia to replace the [Berlin] wall, a curtain separating the Christian and Islamic worlds.' [Cited by Lueg, op. cit., p.11] Again, those who travelled through that 'curtain' can do no more than record that the opposite appeared to be the case. Far from reducing to essences, in this case, a pacific, pluralistic Christianity confronting a totalitarian and belligerent Islam, the Bosnian war, despite its complexities, usually presented a

pacific, defensive Muslim community struggling for a multiethnic vision of society against a Christian aggressor committed to preserving the supposed ethnic hygiene of local Christendom. In Bosnia the stereotypes were so precisely reversed that it is remarkable that they could have survived at all. Here the Christians were the 'Oriental barbarians', while the Muslims represented the 'European ideal' of parliamentary democracy and conviviality. Neither can we explain away the challenge to stereotypes by asserting that religion was a minor ingredient in the very secularized landscape of post-Titoist Yugoslavia. The Bosnian President was a mosque-going Muslim who had been imprisoned for his beliefs under the Communists. The Muslim religious hierarchy had been consistent in its support for a multiethnic, integrated Bosnian state. Ranged against them were all the forces of the local Christian Right, as the Greek Orthodox synod conferred its highest honour, the Order of St Denis of Xante, on Serb radical leader Radovan Karadzic. Ignoring the unanimous verdict of human rights agencies, the Greek Synod apparently had no qualms about hailing him as 'one of the most prominent sons of our Lord Jesus Christ, working for peace.' [Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 85.]

<sup>41</sup> In particular, we may identify distinctive high civilizations among Muslim Africans, Arabs, Turks (including Central Asians), Persians (including, as an immensely fertile extension, Muslim India), and the population of the Malay archipelago, radiating from the complex court cultures of Java.

<sup>42</sup> The defining demand of the Reformation was the return to the most literal meaning of Scripture. Hence Calvin: 'Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it resolutely. Let us not merely neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense.' (John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Edinburgh, 1965), 84-5. Is this what the West is demanding of us? That a Muslim state should, in consequence, be a 'city of glass', like Calvin's terrified Geneva?

<sup>43</sup> Fortuyn was not a marginal voice. His funeral at Rotterdam Cathedral, reverently covered by Dutch television, attracted a vast crowd of mourners. As his coffin passed down the city's main street, the Coolingsel, so many flowers were thrown that the vehicle itself almost disappeared from sight, recalling, to many, the scenes attending the funeral of Princess Diana. The election performance of his party a week later was a posthumous triumph, as his associate Hilbrand Nawijn was appointed minister for asylum and immigration. Fortuyn's desire to close all Holland's mosques was not put into effect, but a number of new, highly-restrictive, policies have been implemented. Asylum seekers now have to pay a seven thousand Euro deposit for compulsory Dutch language and citizenship lessons. A 90 percent cut in the budget of asylum seeker centres has been approved. An official government enquiry into the Dutch Muslim community was ordered by the new parliament in July 2002. (These are old statistics but, I presume, the situation has deteriorated since then).

<sup>44</sup> The alternative is poverty, failure, and - just possibly - the B52s.

<sup>45</sup> In fact, we could propose as the key distinction between a great religion and a sect the ability of the former to accommodate and respect substantial diversity. Fortuyn, and other European politicians, seek to build a new Iron Curtain between Islam and Christendom, on the assumption that Islam is an ideology functionally akin to communism, or to the traditional churches of Europe.

<sup>46</sup> The great tragedy is that some of our brethren would agree with him. There are many Muslims who are happy to describe Islam as an ideology. One suspects that they have not troubled to look the term up, and locate its totalitarian and positivistic undercurrents. It is impossible to deny that certain formulations of Islam in the twentieth century resembled European ideologies, with their obsession with the latest certainties of science, their regimented cellular structure, their utopianism, and their implicit but primary self-definition as advocates of communalism rather than of metaphysical responsibility.

<sup>47</sup> *The Independent* July 28, 2002. There are, of course, significant oversimplifications in this analysis. There are some individuals in the new movements who do have a substantial grounding in Islamic studies. And the juxtaposition of 'political' and 'Islam' will always be redundant, given that the Islamic, Ishmaelite message is inherently liberative, and hence militantly opposed to oppression.

<sup>48</sup> On the ground, the West is keener to export than to import, to shape, rather than be shaped. As such, its universalism can seem imperial and hierarchical, driven by corporations and strategic imperatives that owe nothing whatsoever to non-Western cultures, and acknowledge their existence only where they might turn out to be obstacles. Likewise, Westerners, when they settle outside their cultural area, almost never assimilate to the culture which newly surrounds them.

<sup>49</sup> It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. The case for classical Islam as an enlightenment that succeeded in retaining the sovereignty of God thus seems a credible one. It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. Also see Luce Lopez-Baralt, *The Sufi Trobar Clus*, IAP, Lahore, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. Xx.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Garaudy, *Promesses de l' Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 19.

<sup>52</sup> Take, for instance, the American Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs, for whom the Enlightenment did away with Jewish faith in God, while the Holocaust did away with Jewish faith in humanity. As he writes: "*They lost faith in a utopian humanism that promised: 'Give up your superstitions! Abandon the ethnic and religious traditions that separate us one from the other! Subject all aspects of life to rational scrutiny and the disciplines of science! This is how we will be saved.' It didn't work. Not that science and rationality are unworthy; what failed was the effort to abstract these from their setting in the ethics and wisdoms of received tradition.*" (Peter Ochs, 'The God of Jews and Christians', in Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder and Oxford, 2000), 54.)

Another voice from deep in the American Jewish intellectual tradition that many in the Muslim world assume provides the staunchest advocates of the Enlightenment. This time it is Irving Greenberg: "*The humanistic revolt for the 'liberation' of humankind from centuries of dependence upon God and nature has been shown to sustain a capacity for demonic evil. Twentieth-century European civilization, in part the product of the Enlightenment and liberal culture, was a Frankenstein that authored the German monster's being. [...]*"

Moreover, the Holocaust and the failure to confront it make a repetition more likely - a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone - and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood. (Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism, Christianity and Partnership after the Twentieth Century', in Frymer-Kensky, *op. cit.*, 26.)

<sup>53</sup> Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes, by Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1966), 140.

<sup>54</sup> The implications of the collapse of Enlightenment reason for theology have been sketched out by George Lindbeck in his *The Nature of Doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age* (London, 1984).

<sup>55</sup> Traditional Islam, as is scripturally evident, cannot sanction either policy. Extremism, however, has been probably the more damaging of the two. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both narrate from A'isha, (*r.a.*), the hadith that runs: 'Allah loves kindness in all matters.' Imam Muslim also narrates from Ibn Mas'ud, (*r.a.*), that the Prophet (*salla'Llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*) said: 'Extremists shall perish' (*halaka'l-mutanatti'in*). Commenting on this, Imam al-Nawawi defines extremists as 'fanatical zealots' (*al-muta'ammiqun al-ghalun*), who are simply 'too intense' (*al-mushaddidun*).

<sup>56</sup> "Faith in the future: Islam after the Enlightenment", *First Annual Altaf Gauhar Memorial Lecture*, Islamabad, 23 December 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Basit Koshul, "Studying the Western Other..", in *The Religious Other- Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> I think that Murad is much closer to advocating a "redeem, reform, embrace" approach to the Enlightenment than appears to be the case at first glance. This is suggested by the proposal he makes regarding contemporary Islam's engagement with modern feminism. The following is a quote from the concluding part of Murad's essay titled "Islam, Irigaray and the Retrieval of Gender": <http://www.masud.co.uk/islam/ahm/gender.htm>

Feminism, in any case, has no orthodoxy, as Fiorenza reminds us; and certain of its forms are repellent to us, and are clearly damaging to women and society, while others may demonstrate striking convergences with the Shari'a and our gendered cosmologies. We advocate a nuanced understanding which tries to bypass the sexism-versus-feminism dialectic by proposing a theology in which the Divine is truly gender neutral, but gifts humanity with a legal code and family norms which are rooted in the understanding that, as Irigaray insists, the sexes 'are not equal but different', and will naturally gravitate towards divergent roles which affirm rather than suppress their respective genius.

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

<sup>59</sup> David Hume, *Essays* (Oxford, 1963), 469.

<sup>60</sup> In spite of all stereotypes, the degree of violence in the Muslim world remains far less than that of Western lands governed by the hope of a persuasive secular

social contract. [17] Perhaps this is inevitable: the Enlightenment was, after all, nothing but the end of the Delphic principle that to know the world we must know and refine and uplift ourselves. Before Descartes, Locke and Hume, all the world had taken spirituality to be the precondition of philosophical knowing. Without love, self-discipline, and care for others, that is to say, without a transformation of the human subject, there could be no knowledge at all. The Enlightenment, however, as Descartes foresaw, would propose that the mind is already self-sufficient and that moral and spiritual growth are not preconditions for intellectual eminence, so that they might function to shape the nature of its influence upon society. Not only is the precondition of the transformation of the subject repudiated, but the classical idea, shared by the religions and the Greeks, that access to truth itself brings about a personal transformation, is dethroned just as insistently. [This has been discussed with particular clarity by Michel Foucault, *L'Hermeneutique du sujet: Cours au College de France (1981-2)* (Paris, 2001), pp.16-17] Relationality is disposable, and the laundromat turns out to be a centrifuge.

<sup>61</sup> Vaclav Havel could write that 'the totalitarian systems warn of something far more serious than Western rationalism is willing to admit. They are [...] a grotesquely magnified image of its own deep tendencies, an extremist offshoot of its own development' (William Ophuls, *Requiem for Modern Politics: the tragedy of the Enlightenment and the challenge of the new millennium* [Boulder and Oxford: Westview, 1997], 258); this seems somewhat outdated.

<sup>62</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* (second edition, London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 281.

<sup>63</sup> Is this what Melville, whose days in Turkey had made him an admirer of Islam, meant when he made Ishmael the only survivor of the Pequod?



*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 SUFISM:*

Dr. Tahir Mahmood

Dr. Muhammad Sultan Shah

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> For example, his Brother Sayed Muhammad Hussain was a gazetted officer in the Medical Department.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

### **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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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'.<sup>14</sup>

#### **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.<sup>15</sup> 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'.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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'.<sup>19</sup> 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'.<sup>20</sup>

### **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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

### **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”.<sup>23</sup>
2. Sayed Nadir Hussain Shah had a brilliant record which extended over 27 years of unflinching devotion to duty.<sup>24</sup>
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”.<sup>25</sup>
4. The Loss of the head of family meant there were sever hardships his family and children were going through.<sup>26</sup>

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’.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

### **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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup>

### **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 highlights 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. Alama 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.

This shows some further light on the case. The Lahore, ... 31st July, 1918. ...

I will acknowledge that the question is ... family ...

29 My dear Mr. Thompson,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the family of Syed Nadir Hussain Shah Tehsildar Bhera who was murdered most brutally the other day in a village of Bhera Dist. while on recruiting duty. The deceased was a personal friend of mine; and it is for this reason that I have taken the liberty to address you on the subject. He belonged to a highly respectable fami Punjab family which has furnished several energetic and loyal Public Servants. Syed Nadir Hussain's father Khan Bahadur Syed Alam Shah was an E.A.C. whose good public service was duly recognised by Sir Walter Lawrence. Other members of the family - some of whom are my personal friends - are already in Public Service and doing good work. Syed Nadir Hussain has a brilliant record which extends over 27 years of unflinching devotion to duty. During the 20 years of my friendship with him I always found him extremely conscientious and most sincerely devoted to his work. I know he sometimes expressed a vague apprehension of a violent end, but that feeling never made him shirk his duty in the performance of which he has at last given his life. He has left behind a widow, a married daughter and 5 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 recognise, in some fitting manner, the great services of Syed Nadir Hussain. The family to which the deceased belonged

*was about ...*  
*... to the ...*  
*... of ...*  
*... in ...*  
*... family*  
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*Stamp Lahore*  
*27 Prof. Tahir Mahmood*  
*28 ... 13/10/18*

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 held 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*

Sialk,

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 Eyed 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*

~~6/25~~ 27/8 Ad 9/8/18

27/8 Ali 10/8 K. K. W. F.

S. Z. Khan Lahore

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

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>1</sup> For details see, Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005).
  - <sup>2</sup> Sahibzada Muhammad Abdur Rasul, *The History of Sargodha* (Sargodha: University of Sargodha, 2006), p. 205.
  - <sup>3</sup> Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988) p.45
  - <sup>4</sup> M. S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War* (repr. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1997), p. 37.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.
  - <sup>6</sup> 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.
  - <sup>7</sup> Abdur Rasul, *The History of Sargodha*, p. 205.
  - <sup>8</sup> Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, p. 47.
  - <sup>9</sup> Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. Thompson, 31 July 1918.
  - <sup>10</sup> B. T. Gibbon, Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District to Lt. Col. Sir Frank Pophan Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, No.44, 10 December 1918.
  - <sup>11</sup> Sayed Muhammad Hussain (Nadir Hussain Shah's brother) to Deputy Commissioner Shahpur District, 25 October 1918.
  - <sup>12</sup> M. S. Leigh, *War Services of the Shahpur District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazetteer Press, n.d.), p. 10.
  - <sup>13</sup> See the report submitted by J. Slattery Superintendent of Police, Shahpur District, Sargodha.
  - <sup>14</sup> Feroz Khan Noon, *From Memory* (Islamabad: The National Book Foundation, 1993), p. 77. Also see Leigh, *War Services*, p. 11
  - <sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Sir Frank Pophan Young, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division to the Financial Secretary to the Government of Punjab, 2 January 1919.
  - <sup>16</sup> Extract from the Judgment of Special Tribunal in Behk Lurka Murder Case.
  - <sup>17</sup> Letter of Accountant General Punjab Lahore to the Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District vide P.N. 26-1720, 19 November 1918.
  - <sup>18</sup> Accountant General Punjab to the Deputy Commissioner, Shahpur District, 1 November 1918.
  - <sup>19</sup> Lt. Col. Sir Frank Popham Young to the Financial Secretary to the Government of Punjab, 2 January 1919.
  - <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>21</sup> The letter written by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. I. P. Thompson, dated 31 July 1918.
  - <sup>22</sup> My. I. P. Thompson's letter to Dr. Muhammad Iqbal dated 18 August, 1918.
  - <sup>23</sup> The letter written by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal to Mr. I. P. Thompson dated 31 July 1918.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



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

<sup>28</sup> Finance Department Letter No. 272 of 1919

<sup>29</sup> Telegram Superintendent, Department of Revenue and Agriculture received on 28 November 1919.

<sup>30</sup> Registrar Punjab Secretariat, the 12 th January 1920.

<sup>31</sup> 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

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\* The Paper was written last year for the International Conference on Jerusalem at Doha, Qatar, which was postponed due to problems in the Arab world. It was now held from 26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2012. The Paper was printed and distributed among the participants of the Conference with its Arabic translation. Now, a portion on Khawaja Ghulam Farid has been added along with a few more things mainly taking into account the deliberations of the Conference. The material has been re-arranged.

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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 پاک<sup>3</sup>

### **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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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...."<sup>8</sup>

He says:

### شام و فلسطین

رندانِ فرانسیس کا نہ  
پُر ہے گُرنِگ سے ہر شیشہ حَلب کا  
ہے خاکِ فلسطین پہ یہودی کا اگر حق  
ہسپانیہ پر حق نہیں کیوں اہلِ عَرَب کا  
مقصد ہے ملوکیتِ انگلیس کا کچھ اور

## قصہ نہیں نارنج کا یا شہد و زُطَب کا<sup>9</sup>

### 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.<sup>10</sup>

### 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 رگِ جاں پنچہ یہود میں ہے  
سنا ہے میں نے، غلامی سے اُمتوں کی نجات  
خودی کی پرورش و لذت نمود میں ہے!<sup>11</sup>

### 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.<sup>12</sup>

### رپ

تاک میں بیٹھے ہیں مدت سے یہودی سود خوار  
جن کی روباہی کے آگے پیچ ہے زورِ پلنگ  
خود بخود گرنے کو ہے پکے ہوئے پھل کی طرح  
دیکھیے پڑتا ہے آخر کس کی جھولی میں فرنگ!<sup>13</sup>

### 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.<sup>14</sup>

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".<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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".<sup>21</sup>

ا م

بیچاری 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  
ممكن ہے کہ یہ دانشمہ پیرکِ افرنگ  
ابلیس کے تعویذ سے کچھ روز سنبھل جائے<sup>22</sup>

#### 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.<sup>23</sup>

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....<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>

Iqbal died on 21<sup>st</sup> 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:

بدھ مجوس یہود نصارا ہندو تے دیندار  
آکھن پاک منزہ ہے بے انت الکھ اپار<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup>

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 قرآن<sup>29</sup>

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 نوں موہیا  
رسم رسالت رسدا (ڈھولا ماہی)<sup>30</sup>

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.

د عرب دا ملک طرب دا سارا باغ<sup>31</sup>

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

واہ د عرب دیاں خوش طر خوب  
گیاں و سر وطن دیاں گا، میں خو

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.

ملک س نوری ہے ر ری  
عا پک ری کون م ا ر

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

ونج ڈٹھم مد عالی جتھ کون و ن دا والی  
ہے د تی س خالی پیا نور رسالت چھکے

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 سوہنی ریتے لاوے دل نوں پریم پلیتے  
دسرے چڑ صدقے کیتے اصولوں 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 ڈٹھرا نیک مہینہ

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

حرم معلیٰ روشن ہے نوری آئینہ

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

عرب دی ساری د تی سوہنی صاف نگینہ<sup>32</sup>

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 ر 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، سوہنی 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 سیجھ سہا توں تے کوں جوڑ توں  
ا ملک کوں آپ وساتوں پ ا ی<sup>33</sup>

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.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>9</sup> *Kuliyat-i-Iqbal* (Urdu), Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2004, p. 668.
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- <sup>22</sup> *Kuliyat-i-Iqbal* (Urdu), Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2004, p. 668.
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- <sup>26</sup> Tahir Mehmood Koreja, *Divan-i-Khawaja Farid*, Al-Faisal Nashran-o-Tajran Kutb, Lahore, 2011, Kafi 269.
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THE FORGOTTEN TREASURE OF IQBAL'S  
*RECONSTRUCTION*

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## ABSTRACT

Iqbal's is the unique flowering of poetical, mystical and philosophical genius in recent Islamic history. What makes him truly modern and gives him a permanent places in the annals of modern history is his largely forgotten gospel of religious modernism, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

*Reconstruction* makes Iqbal the most important intellectual of modernist Islam. His unique contribution in appropriating modern science and its methodological and philosophical premises in Islam has however not been duly appreciated. He has attempted to write a prolegomena to new *kalam*. *Reconstruction* is the boldest ever critique of traditional religious thought in the light of modern episteme. It is the most frantic and intellectually advanced attempt to reconcile the cognitive and epistemic universe of traditional Islam with that of modern scientific and philosophical thought. It attempts to reorient or restructure traditional hierarchy of power relations. One can safely assert that the Muslims have not realized the significance of this Iqbal who wrote *Reconstruction*. This book has either not been read or understood or reckoned with seriously by the Muslims.

The significance of Iqbalian insights for modern Islam however can't be overemphasized. If modern thought needs to be respectfully approached and if Islam is to appeal to modern sensibility, then Iqbal's significance and relevance can't be doubted and his contribution needs to be highlighted. This article is an attempt to point out importance of this ignored and forgotten treasure. Providing a consistent theory for modernist Muslim approach to science, Iqbal is undoubtedly worth reckoning for not only the student and historian of modern Islam but also for anyone interested in the field of philosophy of religion and modern science in general.



Iqbal's is the unique flowering of poetical, mystical and philosophical genius in recent Islamic history. He has few predecessors and fewer inheritors. His encyclopedic mind wrestled with almost all the important issues that modern Muslim and modern man confronts in his life's odyssey. His is the original, bold and very unorthodox approach. He is an arch innovator and non-conformist. His attempt of bridging philosophy and religion, or in general, knowledge and religion is unique in boldness and originality. What makes him truly modern and gives him a permanent places in the annals of modern history is his largely forgotten gospel of religious modernism, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

*Reconstruction* makes Iqbal the most important intellectual of modernist Islam. His unique contribution in appropriating modern science and its methodological and philosophical premises in Islam has however not been duly appreciated. In an unprecedented move in Islamic history he reinterpreted the idea of finality of prophethood in such terms as to legitimize modern scientific project. His apology for the modern age that defines itself with respect to modern science constitutes a very interesting chapter not only in the history of Islam but also that of modern thought. His demythologizing, evolutionist, empiricist, inductionist, rationalist reading of Islam constitutes his unique contribution in the development of modernist Islam. His *Reconstruction* is an attempt in the direction of appropriating modern scientific thought in Islam. His brilliant insights in this context need to be foregrounded and critically evaluated. Iqbal has written and embarked on hitherto unprecedented enterprise of reconstruction of traditional religious thought in the light of modern scientific and philosophical developments. This kind of title of any book and this kind of reconstructive work implying reconstruction of traditional metaphysical-philosophical-theological-juristic thought structures has never been proposed in the history of Islam before him. There is a huge difference between reconstruction and reinterpretation. Many think that Iqbal has just written some sort of a new *tafsir* like so many new commentaries that have been read in the modern age. This only shows crass ignorance of Iqbal and traditional metaphysics. Indeed he has attempted to modernize Islam, not only its theology but *shariah* in many significant ways. He has attempted to write a

prolegomena to new *kalam*. *Reconstruction* is the boldest ever critique of received/traditional religious thought in the light of modern episteme. It is the most frantic and intellectually advanced attempt to reconcile the cognitive and epistemic universe of traditional Islam with that of modern scientific and philosophical/thought. It attempts to reorient or restructure traditional hierarchy of power relations. One can safely assert that the Muslims have not realized the significance of this Iqbal who wrote *Reconstruction*. This book has either not been read or understood or reckoned with seriously by the Muslims. The Muslims have usually denounced it (excepting certain modernists) or they have not bothered to read or could not understand it as it demands good familiarity with everything that constitutes modern episteme – one must have a deep acquaintance with the whole philosophical tradition of the West, especially its post-Cartesian developments, with modern science and its methodological and philosophical assumptions, with modern social-political and economic structures that shape modern mind, with changed perception that has grown from a sort of frameshift mutation of the traditional religious (Christian) *Weltanschauung*. Understanding *Reconstruction* also needs a knowledge of such variety of disciplines as modern physics, psychology and psychoanalysis, biology and even mathematics to certain extent. One must also have a good understanding of history of civilizations and religions and especially of Muslim history to properly contextualize and foreground the theses of *Reconstruction*. The integrated knowledge of both sciences of humanities, both traditional and modern, alone will allow one to properly understand and appreciate the radical nature of his claims made in *Reconstruction*.

He and his *Reconstruction* are phenomena in themselves and history hardly ever repeats such phenomena. His appropriation of modern science in Islam, his rereading of Sufism and his individualist religious metaphysics are uniquely his and constitute his originality. It is ridiculous to argue that Ibn Hnifa did something similar. Ulema have some reservations about the whole project of reconstruction. If any *aalim* had done something similar there would have been no reason for saying that “it would have been better if Iqbal had not written it.” Rational appropriation of traditional Islamic metaphysical thought that invokes modern philosophical and scientific thought structures as has been done in these lectures has hardly any orthodox/ traditional warrant. Saeed Akbar Abadi’s defense of *Reconstruction* in traditional terms has not found and cannot find much favour with the generality of Ulema. Iqbal’s concept of ego, his individualistic metaphysics, his divinization of time, his

epistemology, his rejection of orthodox Unitarian Sufi metaphysics, his theological and philosophical dualism, his humanist orientation, his evolutionist and empiricist approach, his concept of God's omniscience and freedom, his view of good and evil, his concept of *taqdir* and so many other dimensions of his metaphysical and theological thought—all are not easily reconcilable with traditional/orthodox interpretation of Islam. Iqbal has reread Rumi and certain other great classical authorities and conceptions of traditional Islam from the perspective of philosophy of ego and this constitutes his unique approach to Islam. There is no other modern Muslim philosopher or traditional scholar who has done anything comparable. Iqbal and his overall philosophy, not just his *Reconstruction* are phenomena in themselves, unique, unprecedented. Iqbal is in himself an institution, a school that originated with him. Here I intend neither to defend nor to critique Iqbal vis-à-vis traditional metaphysical/mystical/religious thought spearheaded by either the exoteric ulema or the Sufi authorities or the perennialists but just point out how radical a divergence is between the two.

There is only one Iqbal and only one *Reconstruction* in history. Without a deep familiarity with such abstruse metaphysical and Sufi works as *Insani Kamil* of Al-Jili, *Fusus* of Ibn Arabi, such modern philosophers as Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson etc., such scientific works as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Freud's important works, Fraser and Comte's works, such physicist philosophers as Einstein and Eddington, such theosophical works as *Secret Doctrine* to name only a few, understanding Iqbal or his *Reconstruction* and his originality and genius is not possible. He is *mazloom* as someone has well remarked as everybody who has memorized some of his verses and has not mastered or at least has not good acquaintance with world's metaphysical, religious, philosophical and literary traditions has hardly any moral right to dabble in Iqbali studies or discuss *Reconstruction*.

Another point is understanding Islam – its doctrines, both at theological and metaphysical planes, its esoteric and exoteric dimensions, its symbolist sciences. It is safe to assert that most interpretations and appropriations of Islam with which we are flooded are guilty of meaning closure as they ignore/marginalize some aspect or dimension of Islam as an integral metaphysical-mystical-theological tradition. Islam ultimately is practical existential affair; it is a matter of realization rather than disputation. Faith and metaphysic transcend language and thought. And it is only to the pure in heart to which is granted God's vision. Reason is limited; it cannot comprehend the Infinite that traditional metaphysics (but not

its modern Western counterpart) tackles. Mysteries of faith become clear to only those who purify themselves with severe moral discipline as Iqbal emphasizes in his *Asrar* and *Ramooz*. It is ultimately only in silence that God dawns. This is because God transcends phenomena and all categorical frameworks. He is not caught in the net of language. Those who are closer to God know that he is to be attained by humility and *faqr* and in the believer's heart in utter silence. *Mutakallim* and *faqeeh* with their propositional exoteric approach cannot comprehend or apprehend Gos as Iqbal also says. We need to be lovers to have some glimpse of transcendence. Love alone can transcend finitude. Iqbal's whole metaphysics of love makes this point admirably. Many fatwas were issued against him but he didn't consider them worth reckoning and how could he for even Jibriel was his prey and he was the only secret in *seena-i-kaayinat*, and deemed man to be *masjoodi kayinat*.

We need to rediscover Iqbal in light of his forgotten / ignored / misappropriated *Reconstruction*. Their relevance for modern(ist) Islam can't be overemphasized. The epochal significance of *Reconstruction* which is a key in understanding this seminal thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Islam lies in:

1. Plea for opening the gates of absolute *Ijtihad*( *ijtihad-i-mutlaq*).
2. Questioning many an outworn theological and juristic dogmas that do not have any Quranic warrant.
3. Anticlerical spirit of Islam.
4. Questioning or pointing out all pervasive influence of Greek thought on Islamic heritage and arguing for emancipation from it.
5. A unique attempt to bridge the West and the East by focussing on a sort of modern (Western) reading of Islam which is seen as a bridge builder as though originating from the East has intellectual affinities with the West.
6. How creative and fruitful can be an encounter between Islam and the West and pointing out hitherto unheeded affinities between them; how Islam has a potential to adapt to modernity and how the latter could be moulded in an Islamic framework is brilliant.
7. Amongst a variety of responses to modernity such as traditionalist, fundamentalist, neofoundationist and secularist Iqbalian "inner radicalist" interpretation of Islam in response to modernity and a sort of Islamized modernity has the merit of being capable of wide appeal to modern audience that is committed irrevocably to thought structures of post-Renaissance – empirical scientific inductionist evolutionist this-worldly orientation. Iqbal takes modernity as 'the given' with its concrete mind and to physiology and then tries to interpret/reconstruct

religious thought of Islam. For many modern thinkers which include some influential theologians Iqbalian type of response is the only possible religious response that could be taken seriously by modern man. For the modern scientific mind Iqbal's case is a worth reckoning one and cannot be a priorily dismissed. The secular scientific colouring of almost everything modern incapacitates modern man from sympathetically responding to traditional religious thought structures as they stand. In a world that declares itself post-Darwinian post-Nietzschan and post-Freudian and now post-modern where traditional religious symbols are either rejected or appropriated in a secular perspective as essentialistic thinking is disparaged, the God of exoteric theology who stands over and against man as some interested being and manipulator of human destiny and the universe and threatening human individuality and freedom, is dead. This is a world where nothing makes sense except in the light of evolution and which is committed to some sort of progressivist myth where material biological and psychological roots of human personality are very much emphasized and taken as *ab initio* for any other reading of man such as spiritual one, where science stands almost as a metanarrative, reason's authority is supreme and where anthropocentric humanistic secularist assumptions are so deeply entrenched – in short where everything that goes by the name of tradition is suspect – Iqbal's modernist (non-orthodox) reading of tradition is of great value. If modern man is not willing to renounce modernity with its aintitraditional commitments lock, stock and barrel and still in search of a soul he would possibly see his salvation in such appropriations of modernity as that of Iqbal. To enter a dialogue with modernity on latter's terms is possible (to negotiate *sulahi-budaibiyah* with it) in Iqbalian modernist reconstructionist perspective. If the West cannot fundamentally reconsider and revise its Aristotelian and then Cartesian heritage that necessitate a dualistic mode of thinking that absolutizes subject-object duality and is not quite favorably taking mystico-metaphysical outlook and is irrevocably committed to the realm of finitude and some sort of humanism Iqbal's personalist philosophy and individualist religious metaphysics has something to offer for consideration.

8. If reconstruction of religious thought is a need as modernists argue then Iqbal's is a great contribution. He has provided the methodology and consistent theory for modernist reading of Islam.

We shall now take up certain points that Iqbal has raised in *Reconstruction*.

Iqbal lays down the charter of *Reconstruction* in its preface. He has succinctly put forward his agenda in the book. The very first line that “Islam is a religion which emphasizes deed rather than idea” is quite a loaded statement in tune with modern sensibility. Iqbal has elsewhere declared that action is the highest form of contemplation. This is quite an innovative rereading of the whole Eastern tradition. Modern man, for good or worse, is committed to action instead of contemplation. It is not however very clear what Iqbal here means by the word “Idea”. But one may reasonably infer that he has in mind eastern and Platonic idea of Idea and contemplation for which the consistent philosophy of ego has not much space as the East is against the ego as well as actions that fortify it as a separate individual entity in a tensionful state with a dialectical relation to the world and associated dualistic philosophical framework. The whole metaphysical and mystical tradition privileges contemplation over action, being over becoming, eternity and space over time, universal over individual (spirit over soul and body). However Iqbal problematizes most of these binaries and sometimes argues for reversing the hierarchies.

Starting with this assertion Iqbal makes another statement that the traditionalists would contest. He says that for a concrete type of mind the traditional modes of thought (as represented in classical mainstream Sufism as he explains after a few lines) are no longer valid or need to be adapted to changed perception. This is indeed true but the question is ‘is not concrete type of mind itself a problem?’ Could not the whole problem lie in modern mind’s peculiar make-up itself? Should it not be asked to remould itself and renounce the whole (rationalist-empiricist) philosophical-scientific tradition that has shaped it in the first place.

God of the traditional religions (or the Absolute of traditional metaphysics) – and the means of realizing Him/It (metaphysical and mystical realizations) – is something that is alien to modern sensibility. Modern man’s turning away from God is not entirely unconnected with Cartesian philosophical turn. From a strictly Eastern viewpoint mind itself is the problem, the inheritance and consequence of the primordial fall and needs to be transcended. Mind itself is a distorting lens and thus illusory entity. The “I”, the cogito, the thinking thing is a weak reed. It constitutes the misery of men though for the modern Western philosophical tradition it constitutes his grandeur and the defining identity of man.

Modern mentality seems to be trapped in the realm of the individual, the finite the psyche, and does not know much of the universal, the infinite, the intellect, the spirit. However Iqbal is very anxious to somehow bring modern mind back to God, to make heaven accessible and desirable for him, to present it in an image that is not too incongruous with hum. This necessitates giving great concessions to modern sensibility. But Iqbal, unlike the traditionalists, thinks that times have changed for good and there is nothing wrong with the modern mind itself, with time's movement or Islam's moving closer towards the West. Much of modern psychology and modern psychological turn is implicitly accepted in the preface. The type of mystical meditational techniques that he demands cannot be devised because all realization must be violence to the mind, the ego, the realm of thought and language. The domain of psyche has to be transcended. For the realization of true *tawhid*, subject must be transformed rather annihilated in the Divine subjecthood. Man cannot utter *shahadah*. The separate experiencing subject must go. The experiencer, the empirical self, the separate subject who perceives the world and God as the other, the objects must go. Philosophical and theological dualisms are simply irreconcilable with the Unitarian world view where God alone is the Reality, the whole Reality, the infinite. Mysticism and metaphysics are antithesis of anthropocentric humanistic worldview of the modern west. Only God is and man is not in Sufism and traditional metaphysics. The Spirit in man that alone constitutes his glory and that alone can assert "I" is not his though in him. This Spirit is not realizable in time; it is not realized through actions/deeds and becoming or through any concrete experiences. It is realized in the repose of being, in the silence of all thought and mind, in love. For this self-naughting is a must. All separative divisive entities such as the mind and the ego must be transcended. Iqbal's concept of *ishq* comes close to it though he would like to appropriate from a personalistic individualistic metaphysical perspective. Such weird and useless phenomena in the western personalist philosophical context/phenomena as experience of sleep (rather dreamless sleep) and mystical ecstasy hold a key to such a state. Iqbal does reach a threshold of such things at many places in his *Reconstruction*. He too feels need of transcending the fundamental dualisms of thought and being by seeing religions object not in the category of seeing but being. But the proposed means for doing so in the context of background dualistic philosophy seem to be problematic. New "suitable" techniques for doing so can not be developed. Even Rajnesh – the most modern of the mystics – also who concedes so

much to the perversions of modern mind could not devise technique that are not psychologically less violent. His dynamic meditations or his techniques for attaining silence all do great violence to modern mind.

Iqbal makes another big claim that we need to reconstruct theology in the light of modern discoveries. This seminal claim has hardly been made in the history of Islam until modern times. From a metaphysical point of view such claims that presuppose modern science's epistemic sovereignty are problematic. Integral metaphysics is independent of developments in individual science, as Guenon has explained. Traditional cosmology is incommensurate with modern cosmology and has quite a different objective. The same is true of traditional psychology and most traditional sciences. Modern scientific disciplines having abandoned the symbolist view and belief in the hierarchy of existence are simply degenerate residues of traditional sciences according to the perennialists. A science cultivated in a secular perspective is crass ignorance according to the perennialists. Iqbal too is very critical of modern science, its claim to be a metanarrative, its disenchanting alienating soulless mechanistic materialistic worldview. But he is hopeful that religion and modern science will discover hitherto unsuspected harmony and it is possible to reread modern science and its methodological and philosophical assumptions Islamically and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with modern science's knowledge and existence claims. The traditionalists, however, have quite a different view of modern science and reject any constructive dialogue with its. They are for its reorientation that amounts to almost total rejection of post-Renaissance science and see no possibility of reconciliation between modern science and Islam. However if Iqbal just means that law must be reformulated in consonance with changing times it is hard to disagree with him for traditional authorities.

These introductory explanatory remarks provide a context to appreciate a host of theses of *Reconstruction*. We will attempt a brief critical appreciation of some of these theses.

1. Islam is a religion which emphasizes deed rather than idea. This point could not be contested if one understands it from the perspective of Iqbal's concept of *ishq* and concede his rereading of action as contemplation.
2. Traditional Sufi techniques (he does not elaborate what he means by this) are not suitable for concrete type of a mind that modern man's is characteristically. As Iqbal is already critical of Sufi metaphysics – its central doctrine of oneness of being and the idea of the self – so his plea for reformulating its techniques also



is understandable. Modern man has alienated himself from the well-springs of tradition and he finds traditional metaphysics that has hardly any scope for his thought inassimilable. The objective of mystical and metaphysical realization seems to be quite strange and alien to dualist cogito-centred personalist philosophical tradition of the West. The means and techniques that lead to such an end cannot but be suspected on this or that ground.

3. Every age has a right to formulate its own theology as the frontier of human knowledge extends further and farther. Religious thought must adapt itself to changed perceptions generated by modern outlook which is principally shaped by modern science. We must reread our classical tradition in light of modern scientific developments. This may necessitate a partial break from the past or commitment of certain heterodox notions for which we must be prepared. Modern man's demand for a scientific form of religion is quite legitimate and we must reinterpret/ reconstruct traditional religious thought to give it a scientific guise. Iqbal does not clearly explain what he means by "scientific form of religion." But one can reasonably infer that he thinks modern scientific developments – which he later catalogues in the book and which include such things as evolution and psychoanalysis – are vitally relevant in understanding/interpreting traditional religious thought. Any formulation of religious doctrine – which constitutes an intellectual element in religion as it makes existence and knowledge claims – must be respectful (though critically respectful) towards developments in the fund of human knowledge. Science's claim to have some jurisdiction to clarify, test and evaluate knowledge and existence claims of religions – Islam is thus implicitly conceded.
4. Modern mind's empirical and positivist attitude is a fact that is there to stay; religion cannot afford a position that is antithetical to it. Iqbal asserts that religion too has adapted empirical methodology in its exploration of Reality though it treats only a specific type of experience called religious experience. Thus he argues that science and religion have similar methodologies and both build their case on empirical experience. He does not think that there is any necessary link between modern empiricism (and positivism) and reductionist demythologizing agnostic philosophy of modern science. He does not see science committed to any specific ideology and questions its materialist mechanist appropriation at the hands of certain philosophers. He sees science as ideology-free, as innocent looking objective exploration

of reality. Experimental and inductive scientific attitude he sees as characteristically Quranic in spirit.

5. With Whitehead he maintains that the ages of faith are the ages of rationalism. He does not elaborate on his use of the term rationalism. If by rationalism one means giving reason the sovereignty that modern rationalism has given it then it is an unwarranted claim. However Iqbal does not seem to have such a version of rationalism in mind that denies intellectual intuition and revelation. But Iqbal's perspective is not fully identifiable with what the perennialists call the intellectual perspective according to which reason is an individual mental faculty but Intellect is something supra-individual and universal and is capable of absolute certitude and direct apprehension of truth. Islam is intellect centred rather than rationalistic as modern Western philosophy understands the latter. Iqbal's conception of reason illumined by love or *danish-i-yazdani* comes close to the traditional notion of Intellect. Reason complements intuition. Science complements religion. Intuition is developed reason. This seems to be his original claim. However Iqbal accepts non-discursive element of reason. This could well allow him to connect reason to intuition through intellect as Naquib al Attas does. Iqbal doesn't limit reason to conceptual intellect as Stace does. So Iqbal's very original approach needs to be seriously reckoned with. Reason can comprehend the infinite according to Iqbal and this can be possible by means of non-discursive element in reason. Iqbal has Ghazal's critique of reason in mind who argued against such a possibility. I think loose use of terms by philosophers creates confusion. Most philosophical texts don't make any distinction between reason (*ratio*) and intellect (*nous*).
6. The Quran is anticlassical in spirit. This argument is original contribution of Iqbal to classification of Islamic thought. Speculative as against the empirical spirit is alien to the Quranic world-view according to Iqbal.
7. The birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. However carrying this thesis too far and absolutizing the inductive mode as the only Quranic mode of reasoning is unwarranted. The Quran uses deductive as well as inductive argumentation. The speculative tradition has been cultivated in Islam also and it has fructified in magnificent philosophical and metaphysical structures built by Muslim philosophers and sages. However it should also be noted that numerous pointless controversies between Muslim theologians are traceable to Greek influence that privileged essentialist abstract way of seeing things.

8. Hitherto the spirit of Islam had only been partly realized. Our ulema as well as the perennialist authors flatly deny this thesis.
9. The idea of Mahdi is connected with Magian mentality of constant expectation and is alien to the Quranic spirit. He quotes Ibn Khaldun's authority also in this connection. Ulema's view of the same is well known. The Sufi view too and thus any deeper significance of the idea of Mahdi seem to have escaped Iqbal's notice.
10. Muslims did not realize the full meaning and revolutionary import of the idea of finality of prophethood. This is distinctively Iqbalian and unprecedented claim.
11. The Prophet (SAW) heralded the birth of modern age and said goodbye to the ancient mentality by sealing off the institution of prophethood. Now inductive reason will reign. Mystics and all those who invoke supernatural authorities are to be subjected to the critical scrutiny of reason. This might legitimize post-Enlightenment exclusion of nonrational modes of knowledge that led to unilateral development of the West which created huge problems for modern man.
12. There is no qualitative distinction between prophetic and mystic experiences. But he does not explain how should the same experience make one's return creative. Traditional Islam emphasizes qualitative distinction between the two.
13. He does not recognize/accept conception of metaphysical realization and focusses wholly on mystical realization.
14. He takes Lord-man polarity to be absolute and dubs Unitarian Sufism and the doctrine of *Wahdatul Wajud* as pantheistic. This is simply unacceptable if we consider the explanations given by traditional authorities.
15. An act of scientific observation is an act of observing behaviour of God. Science studies habit of Allah. Thus scientific observation is an act of prayer. Scientist is a sage – a mystic in the act of prayer. Modern spirit is thus ingeniously appropriated by Iqbal. We need not refer to the traditionalist view of the same. While as in principle it could be conceded that scientific observation is an act of prayer but when applied to modern science which excludes and even distorts truth because of constraints of its very methodology and then contemplate fruits of modern science's understanding in the "habit of Allah" we hesitate to go too far with Iqbal.
16. Defends Mansoor by his ingenious reinterpretation of his *An'al Haqq*. He does this without the concept of metaphysical realization which is central to Sufi thought. His ambivalent

- attitude towards Sufism or unique individualistic personalistic appropriation of it is his unique characteristic.
17. Dubs all mysticism as quietist and individual centered. He has no concept of prophetic mysticism.
  18. Following Hegel believes in the fundamental unity of thought and being.
  19. Like process philosophers takes a panentheistic rather than classical theistic view of God.
  20. Defends to the hilt man's autonomy and freedom vis-à-vis divine freedom. And gives his own view of divine omniscience.
  21. Gives his own twist to the concept of *taqdir* that is at variance with orthodox metaphysical thought.
  22. Divinizes time following Bergson. Appropriates the traditional notion of eternity in his Bergsonian conception of pure duration. Declares that appreciative self lives in eternity. Attempts to synthesize otherwise polar opposites of time and eternity in the concept of appreciative self. But he does not satisfactorily work out complex relation between pure duration and serial time. The Bergsonian influence leads to unorthodox reading of traditional metaphysical and religious thought.
  23. Declares that man due to his fragmentary vision is unable to comprehend the mystery of evil. Leaves the problem of evil largely unsolved.
  24. Disagrees with Sufistic interpretation of the famous light verse of the Quran. Invokes the theory of relativity in its commentary.
  25. Invokes Sufi insights in explaining the concept of creation and makes a panentheistic reading of the Islamic doctrine of creation. He takes recourse to Sufism whenever he encounters difficulty. His central ideas on the self, pure duration, religious experience, creation, heaven and hell, Prophet, love etc. are all deeply informed by Sufism. *Reconstruction* can be described as a Sufi work in modern idiom. Iqbal had later largely retracted his key criticisms of traditional Sufism. Even his idea of the self and its relation to the Divine Self that constituted his key disagreement with traditional Sufism comes very close to traditional view when properly understood.
  26. Hell and heaven are states but that doesn't mean he denies their ontological status. On this point Iqbal is almost in full conformity with traditional metaphysical and Sufistic thought. Iqbal only emphasized the concrete living existential and psychological reality of hell and heaven. On this point he has been widely misunderstood. For him hell and heaven are more real than this world though he rightly rejected unsophisticated view that has

crept in popular exoteric imagination. Iqbal's view on the duration of hell has also been held by great authorities in Islam.

27. Without completely breaking from the past we must boldly chart fresh terrains. We must apply the principle of movement not only to *fiqh* but to other domains of religious thought in order to encounter modern challenges. Iqbal, unlike some extreme modernists didn't nullify the past or tradition but asked for a creative and critical approach to it. It is Rumi rather than any modern philosopher who is his guide (though he would reread him in his own fashion). He is servile imitator of neither the East nor the West but appropriates all the universes in himself. His consciously chosen frame of reference was the Quran though he self avowedly (he has confessed this in one of his letters) saw through the Western eyes as well. But his primary intention was always to defend religion and have a secure place for *umma*.

Thus it is evident that his unique philosophy and interpretation of Islam is understandable only in reference to *Reconstruction*. Masses don't read and understand *Reconstruction*. Even Iqbalian scholars have usually focused on his poetical works. There are very few competent scholars of *Reconstruction* and still fewer studies of it. But comprehensive studies of this seminal work have hardly been attempted. This has caused certain misunderstandings about Iqbal's philosophical and religious thought. Pervasive impact of modern science on Iqbal has yet to be fully documented. Without in depth understanding of modernity and modern science we can't comprehend Iqbal's unique contribution, his differences from traditionalists and why he wrote this book. I will content myself with just pointing out how modern science has impacted on his thought in order to emphasize my point that we must be firmly grounded in knowledge of modern science, its methodology and philosophy to understand Iqbal and *Reconstruction*.

Iqbal's belief in evolution with its methodological naturalism, his idea of perfect man and belief in progress, his eschatology, his interpretation of finality of prophethood, his theodicy, his critique of mysticism, his empiricist defence of religion, his inductionist outlook, his demythologizing attitude towards the legend of Fall, his divinization of time and his time-centred interpretation of Islam, his views on psychology, his rejection of parapsychology or occultism as pseudoscience, his plea for absolute *ijtihad* and dynamism and the whole project of reconstruction of religious thought in Islam, his appropriation of the West as the further development of some of the most important phases of Islamic culture and thus welcoming Islam's movement towards the West, his critical attitude towards

traditions, his privileging of becoming over being and time over space, his interpretation of prophetic and mystical experience, his elevation of scientist to the status of sagehood, his philosophy of ego, his rejection of traditional cosmology, his condoning of the Renaissance, his attitude towards Nature and environment, his interpretation of man's vicegerancy, his reading of many modern scientific notions in the Quran and Islamic history, his rejection of what is called as Islamization of knowledge, his concepts of space, time, causality and destiny, his positivist spirit (seen in his praise of Zia Gokalp), his approaching certain tricky theological issues in the light of modern science, his proofs for the existence of God, his belief in a growing universe, his defense and interpretation of Muslim culture and civilization, his advocacy of deed and action over idea and thought, his advocacy of experimental method, his critique of "Magian" supernaturalism, and "worn out" or "practically a dead metaphysics" of present day Islam – all these reveal the influence and unique appropriation of modern science.

The significance of Iqbalian insights for modern Islam however can't be overemphasized. If the project of reconstruction has any validity, if modern science is really a stupendous problem in the way of traditional Islam, if modern thought needs to be respectfully approached and if Islam is to appeal to modern sensibility, then Iqbal's significance and relevance can't be doubted and his contribution needs to be highlighted. The present piece is an attempt to point out importance of this ignored and forgotten treasure. Providing a consistent theory for modernist Muslim approach to science, Iqbal is undoubtedly worth reckoning for not only the student and historian of modern Islam but also for anyone interested in the field of philosophy of religion and modern science in general.

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

Dr. M. 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.

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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., Sfuffgart 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 grorce 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 و المغرب* 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 literature .....Von 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 praise 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 Osferrichische 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 pupil 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 housed in the staatibibliothak zu Berlin PLreussischer Kulturbeaitz.

Fourteen years study 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 treatise of al-Muhasibi, a famous sufi of the ninth century and kashshaf,s encyclopaedic 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 profound 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 rendered them eloquently into English verse under the title "Islam in Modern Urdu Poetry", published in a swiss journal "Anthropos International Zeitschrift fur Volker-und Sprachkunde" (Freiburg, 1942-45). Many versified or free English translations of these two poems have so far appeared including A.J. Arberry, and Khushwant Singh's renderings, but Bannerth took the initiative of translating them into English and maintained their poetical beauty and depth of thought.

These two poems of Iqbal extol the legacy of Islam and its civilizing role in history, bemoan the fate of Muslims everywhere, and squarely confront the dilemmas 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 employs some of the traditional mystical imagery, are full of allusions to Persian poetry and have both historical and spiritual overtones.

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 based 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 Leopold 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 Alloys Sprenger'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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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 :

بیکر هستی ز آثار خودی است  
بر چه می بینی ز اسرار خودی است

The form of existence is an effect of the Self

Whatsoever thou seest is a secret of the Self<sup>1</sup>

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 *Armghan-e-Hijaz* (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*, *barem* 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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!



## رِ حَق

Adresse respectueuse à Dieu<sup>2</sup>

خوش آن راهی که سامانی نگیرد  
دل او پندِ یاران کم پذیرد  
به آو سوز ناکش سینه بکشای  
ز یک آهش غم صد ساله میرد

Heureux soit le voyageur<sup>3</sup> 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 cruels<sup>4</sup> 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 vin<sup>5</sup> et sont partis

سخن ها رفت از بود و نبودم  
من از خجالت لب خود کم گشودم  
سجودِ زنده مردان می شناسی  
عیار کار 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 besogne<sup>6</sup>

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

Mon cœur s'occupe des « quand et combien »<sup>7</sup>  
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 corps<sup>8</sup>  
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 جلوه بی پرده 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?<sup>9</sup>

ز من هنگامه ئی 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 vacarme<sup>10</sup>  
Qui secoue<sup>11</sup> 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 perte<sup>12</sup>!

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

Ce monde est devenu plus obscur au soleil<sup>13</sup>  
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

غلامم 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 consentement<sup>14</sup>  
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 alourdi<sup>15</sup>

مسلمانی که در بند فرنگ است  
دلش در دست او آسان نیاید  
ز سیمائی که سودم بر در غیر  
سجود 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 Salman<sup>16</sup>

نخواهم این جهان و آن جهان را  
مرا این بس که دانم 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 اولاد 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'idoles<sup>17</sup>, les enfants d'Abraham<sup>18</sup>

Serviront Nemrod<sup>19</sup> jusqu'à quand?

سرودِ رفته باز آید که ناید؟  
نسیمی از حجاز آید که ناید؟  
سرآمد 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 حکیمی 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*<sup>20</sup> ou le poète-philosophe<sup>21</sup>

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'adore<sup>22</sup>

مسلمان فاقه مست و ژنده پوش است  
ز کارش جبرئیل اندر خروش است  
بیا نقش دگر ملت بریزیم  
که این ملت جهان را بار 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 douleur<sup>23</sup>  
Qui ne se contente pas d'un seul monde, mais  
Qui saurait porter les deux mondes sur ses épaules<sup>24</sup>

دگر قومی که ذکر لالهش  
برآرد از دل شب صبحگاهش  
شناسد منزلش را آفتابی  
که ریگ کھکشان روید 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 connait la destination de cette nation  
Et balaie la poussière des constellations dans son chemin

جهان تست در دستِ خسی چند  
کسان او به بندِ ناکسی چند  
هنرور میان کارگاهان  
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 vautours<sup>25</sup>

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

Dans l'esclavage le musulman s'est mis à vendre  
Il est captif de la sorcellerie de l'œil et de l'oreille<sup>26</sup>  
L'esclavage a tellement affaibli les veines de son corps<sup>27</sup>  
Que l'on sent lourd la loi sainte sur nos épaules

پایان چون رسد این عالم پیر  
شود بی پرده هر پوشیده تقدیر  
مکن رسوا حضور خواجه مارا

حساب من ز چشم او نهان گیر

Quand se vieux monde arrive à son terme<sup>28</sup>

Et tout destin caché se révèle

Ne me déshonore pas devant notre maître<sup>29</sup>

Interroge-moi sur mes comptes en les cachant de notre maître

### رسالت

Adresse au Prophète<sup>30</sup>

به این پیری رو یثرب گرفتم

نوا خوان از سرود عاشقانه

چو آن مرغی که در صحرا سر شام

گشاید پر به فکر 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 soir<sup>31</sup>

چه خوش صحرا که در وی کاروانها

درودی خواند و محمل براند

به ریگ گرم او آور سجودی

جبین را سوز تا داغی بماند

Quel heureux désert à travers lequel les caravanes passent,

Chantant des salutations<sup>32</sup> en portant des voyageurs<sup>33</sup>

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 آهنگ عرب نیست

زند آن نغمه کز سیرابی او

خنک دل در بیابانی توان زیست

O chef de caravane! qui est ce non arabe<sup>34</sup>?

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 تاب دل از سوز غم تست

نوای من ز تاثیر دم تست

بنالم زانکه اندر کشور بند

ندیدم بنده ئی 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 confident<sup>35</sup>

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 béni<sup>36</sup> vers nous car en Orient  
Aucun musulman n'est dans un état plus pire que nous

چسان احوال او را بر لب آرم  
تو می بینی نهان و آشکارم  
ز روداد 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 émoussé<sup>37</sup>

نماند آن تاب و تب در خون نابش  
نروید لاله از کشت خرابش  
نیام او تهی چون کیسه او  
به طاق 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 livre<sup>38</sup> gît sur l'étagère ruiné

دل خود را اسیر رنگ و بو کرد  
تهی از ذوق و شوق و آرزو کرد  
صفیر 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 غیرت 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 taverne<sup>39</sup> sont fermées pour lui  
Dans ce pays le musulman meurt tout assoiffé

میرس 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 نقش 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 cœur<sup>40</sup>  
Ils crient si quelqu’un s’empare d’une seule brique de la mosquée  
Et pourtant eux, ils s’enfuient de la mosquée

سبوی خانقاپان خالی از می  
کند مکتب رو طی کرده را طی  
ز بزم شاعران افسرده رفته  
نواها مرده بیرون افتد ازنی

Il n’y pas de vin<sup>41</sup> 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

نگهبان حرم معمار دیر است  
یقینش مرده و چشمش به غیر است



ز انداز نگاه او توان دید  
که نومید از همه اسباب خیر است

Le gardien de Harem<sup>42</sup> s'est mis à construire des temples  
Sa foi est morte et son regard cherche l'appui des étrangers  
De sa façon de regarder même, on peut dire  
Qu'il a perdu tout espoir de sa bien être

به افرنگی 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  
بهای 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 dieu<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Réf. au vin de l'amour divin ;

<sup>6</sup> 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 incompétence ;

<sup>7</sup> Il s'occupe des affaires mondaines ;

<sup>8</sup> Iqbal se réfère à lui-même, à son propre corps ;

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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 ;

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

<sup>13</sup> Le soleil illumine la forme apparente de toutes les choses sur lesquelles il brille. De même il éclaircit 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.

<sup>14</sup> Le poète affirme son amour de Dieu et cherche Sa volonté, Son plaisir et Son contentement par pur amour de Dieu.

<sup>15</sup> Face à ses prières sans ardeur, Iqbal ne se juge pas digne de cette récompense ;

<sup>16</sup> Référence à deux des fameux compagnons du dernier Prophète d'islam : *Bū-ẓar Ghaffari* et *Salman Fārsī*, (que Dieu soit content avec eux) ; les deux étaient connus pour une foi ferme et pour leur amour profond pour le Prophète.

<sup>17</sup> Le monde contemporain

<sup>18</sup> Le peuple musulman colonisé

<sup>19</sup> Les colonisateurs et les impérialistes

<sup>20</sup> Allusion au prophète Moïse à qui on a attribué le nom de *Kalīm* suite à sa conversation avec Allah ;

<sup>21</sup> Iqbal se réfère à sa propre poésie ;

<sup>22</sup> 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 ;

<sup>23</sup> 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

<sup>24</sup> Indication vers la puissance énorme de cette nouvelle nation que désire le poète ;

<sup>25</sup> Critique sur les capitalistes qui exploitent le service des travailleurs ;

<sup>26</sup> Il est séduit par ce monde matériel ;

<sup>27</sup> 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 ».

<sup>28</sup> C'est-à-dire à la fin du monde

<sup>29</sup> Le dernier prophète Mohammad – *la paix et le salut soient sur lui*

<sup>30</sup> Le Prophète Mohammad – *la paix et le salut soient sur lui*

<sup>31</sup> L'arrivée de la vieillesse est exprimée avec l'arrivée du soir

<sup>32</sup> Les salutations s'adressant au Prophète s'appellent *dorīd* en terme arabe

<sup>33</sup> Voyageurs aux litières à chameau

<sup>34</sup> Iqbal réfère à lui-même

<sup>35</sup> Qui te connaisse, qui sache ta grandeur, c'est-à-dire qui respecte et poursuit tes conseils

<sup>36</sup> Iqbal, plongé dans son imagination, se considère dans la cour du Prophète et lui parle d'un ton suppliant

<sup>37</sup> Son cœur est devenu émoussé en supportant des souffrances et des agonies d'esclavage au cours des siècles.

<sup>38</sup> Livre sacré du Coran qui se sert de guide de sa vie

<sup>39</sup> Emploi classique du mot 'taverne' en persan signifie la connotation opposée, celle de spiritualité et de piété

<sup>40</sup> 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 khudī.

<sup>41</sup> C'est le vin de l'amour divin ; ici on remarque l'emploi métaphorique de vin et de taverne.

<sup>42</sup> Grande Mosquée de la Mecque, débarrassée de toutes idoles avec l'arrivée de l'islam au 6<sup>e</sup> siècle

<sup>43</sup> Une seule prosternation nous libère de l'esclavage de faux dieux.