

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

SOME OBSERVATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM– WEST ENCOUNTER

Suheyl Umar

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates 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. 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.

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 Islamic tradition, and how it came to be enshrined in Western thought after the Enlightenment.

The Islamic tradition in principle, as well as in practice, provides compelling answers to many questions pertaining to the relationship between religious tolerance and practice of one's own faith. The lessons drawn from the Islamic tradition reveal that tolerance of 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.

Key words: Tolerance, Allama Iqbal, Secular, Liberal, Transcendence

*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.¹*

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;² the

¹ *Javīd Nāma* in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal* (Persian) (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1994), 672-673.

² He received the Nobel Prize for 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.

second voice was of T. S. Eliot;³ the third voice was that of Iqbal.⁴ 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 فرنگ پیشِ مجاز آورد سجود
 بینای کور و مستِ تماشای رنگ و بوست
 مشرق خراب و مغرب از آن بیشتر خراب
 عالم تمام مرده و بی ذوق جستجوست⁵

Iqbal was seriously thinking about the grave question.

من از بلال و چلیبیا 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.*⁶

In Iqbal's view, the crisis that the world found itself in as it swung on the hinge of the 20th 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

³ Whose “Love Song of G. Alfred Prufrock” appeared in 1915. It was a view of pessimism and boredom.

⁴ 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.

⁵ *Zubūr i 'Ajām*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian), (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1994), 376.

⁶ **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 dīgarī*)—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 *damīr-i ayyām*, which literally means “in the insides of time.” See M. Mir, (ed.), *Iqbal-Nāmah*, Vol. 5, no. 3-4, (Summer and Fall, 2005): 3-6.

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.⁷

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 the 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 worldview, 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 worldview. This is what was wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that his age had come to espouse (فتنه عصرِ روان). In Iqbal's view, Modern Westerners, forsaking clear thinking, allowed themselves to become so obsessed with life's material underpinnings that they wrote for science a blank cheque; a blank cheque for orscience'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 crises, 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? ...⁸

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

⁷ F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, reprinted, (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004), 26.

⁸ *Armaghān i Hijāz*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbāl*, Persian, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1994), 860.

were contending for the mind of the future. The scientific worldview is a wasteland for the human spirit. It cannot provide us the wherewithal 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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—¹¹ 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.”¹² 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

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ See René Guenon, “Individualism,” in *Crisis of the Modern World* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981), 51-65; Also see “Social Chaos” in the same document.

¹¹ less anthropomorphically described in Plotinus's wording

¹² As John Avis and William Provine have said.

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 19th century, Westerners were already more certain that atoms exist than they were confident of any of the distinctive things the Bible speaks of.

This much is straightforward, but it doesn't explain why Westerners aren't still modern rather than Postmodern, for science continues to be the main support of the Western mind. By headcount, most Westerners probably still *are* modern, but I am thinking of frontier thinkers who chart the course that others follow. These thinkers have ceased to be modern because they have seen through the so-called scientific worldview, recognizing it to be not *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.¹³

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:¹⁴

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

¹³ 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”.

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

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.¹⁵ The generally accepted definition of Postmodernism now that, Jean-Francois Lyotard fixed in place decades ago in *The Postmodern Condition* is "incredulity toward metanarratives."¹⁶ 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* unimagined. 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984), xxiv, 3ff.

¹⁷ Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality* (Boston and Shaftsbury, Shambala, 1989).

¹⁸ 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.

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 worldview had brought in the human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia. Cultures and their worldviews 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.¹⁹

شیخ مکتب سے
 شیخ مکتب ہے اک عمارت گر جس کی صنعت ہے رُوح انسانی
 ٹکتہ دلپذیر تیرے لیے کہ گیا ہے حکیم قانی
 ”پیش خورشید بر مکش دیوار
 خوابی ار صحن 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 worldview what so ever! And this is intimately connected to our initial remarks about (فتنہ عصرِ 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 worldviews (or grand narratives) are misguided in principle. Wouldn't we be better off if we

¹⁹ “Shaykh i Maktab” *Kulliyāt i Iqbāl*, Urdu, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1994), 494.

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ Poetry of first magnitude or great poetry itself works as a bridge and with inevitable particularities always carry 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 Whittemore to make the point. He had observed:²²

²⁰ 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?

²¹ 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.

²² In his 1966 article, referring to Iqbal, Robert Whittemore, “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), 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.

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 *Diwan* 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*.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.

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, Kathy Plant, and Robert Wilkinson's *Fifty Eastern Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³ René Guénon, "The Classical Prejudice", *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (NY: Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, 2004), 19. The book was originally written in French and appeared in its first English edition in 1925.

²⁴ 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), 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.'"

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,²⁵ 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 extra optional, 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

²⁵ 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).

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.”²⁶

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.*’²⁷

The Prophet SAW 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-samha*). 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

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Al Quran, 49:13.

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.’²⁸ 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).²⁹

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

²⁸ 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 (2007): 62, 59.

²⁹ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966), 12.

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 ...'³⁰

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 10th 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:³¹

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

³⁰ Quoted in S. A. Schleifer, 'Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History', in *The Spirit of Palestine* (Barcelona, 1994): 8.

³¹ Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent—Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York/London, 2004), 48.

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.³² 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”.’³³

WHENCE THE SACRED VISION OF ISLAM?

The intrinsic nature of the Muslim polity is derived from the Prophet’s SAW 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 SAW. 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 SAW 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.³⁴ 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 SAW 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

³² Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1984), 8.

³³ Mark Cohen, ‘Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History’, in *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.38, (1986):135.

³⁴ A. Guillaume (Tr.) *The Life of Muhammad—A Translation of Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford, 1968), 270-277.

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.³⁵

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.'³⁶

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;³⁷
- the very plurality of these revelations is the result of a divine will for diversity on the plane of human communities;³⁸
- this diversity of revelations and plurality of communities is intended to stimulate a healthy 'competition' or mutual enrichment in the domain of 'good works';³⁹

³⁵ F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol.1, (Princeton, 1990), 217.

³⁶ Al Quran, 5:48.

³⁷ '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).

³⁸ 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* (41:163-164). (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).

³⁹ 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

- 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.⁴⁰

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

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 Sabeans—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.

⁴⁰ 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 SAW 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).'

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 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.⁴¹

⁴¹ 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*

SHARED LEGACY: DIVERSE DESTINIES!

The last remarks bring us to consider the question that we evoked with reference to the remarks of Pim Fortuyn.⁴² 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

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.

⁴² 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/]

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), 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., 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), 85.]

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.⁴³ 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 simply cannot be 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.⁴⁴ 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

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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?

Fortuyn's remarks cited earlier remains with us.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Fortuyn and others who share his views work with the assumption that Islam is an ideology⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁵ 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).

⁴⁶ The alternative is poverty, failure, and - just possibly - the B52s.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ 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.

radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁹ *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.

⁵⁰ 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.

Muslim wisdom from Spain.⁵¹ For the humanities, George Makdisi traces European humanism to Islamic antecedents⁵² 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.”⁵³

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.⁵⁴ The West is loath to refer to this possibility in its makeup and believes that Srebrenica,

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), Xx.

⁵³ Roger Garaudy, *Promesses de l’ Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 19.

⁵⁴ 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*

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-nama*, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'raj: *Inghelab-i Rus u Alman dide am*: 'I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany!'⁵⁵ 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?⁵⁶ 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 *kufir*, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.⁵⁷ 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."⁵⁸ In response Basit Koshul has very pertinently observed:⁵⁹

[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

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.)

⁵⁵ Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes, by Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1966), 140.

⁵⁶ 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).

⁵⁷ 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 'um*). Commenting on this, Imam al-Nawawi defines extremists as 'fanatical zealots' (*al-muta'ammiqūn al-ghālūn*), who are simply 'too intense' (*al-mushaddidūn*).

⁵⁸ "Faith in the future: Islam after the Enlightenment", *First Annual Altaf Gauhar Memorial Lecture*, Islamabad, 23 December 2002.

⁵⁹ 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).

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.⁶⁰

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:⁶¹

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.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ David Hume, *Essays* (Oxford, 1963), 469.

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.⁶² 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.⁶³ 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

⁶² 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), 16-17] Relationality is disposable, and the laundromat turns out to be a centrifuge.

⁶³ 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.

antithesis between tradition and reason.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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!

⁶⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* (second edition, London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 281.

⁶⁵ 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?

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Calvin, John. *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*. Edinburgh, 1965.
2. Cohen, Mark. 'Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History.' In *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.38, (1986)
3. Daniel, Norman. *Islam, Europe and Empire*. Edinburgh, 1966.
4. Fletcher, Richard. *The Cross and the Crescent—Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation*. New York/London, 2004.
5. Gadamer, Hans-Georg. tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method*. second edition, London: Sheed and Ward, 1989.
6. Garaudy, Roger. *Promesses de l' Islam*. Paris: Seuil, 1981.
7. Guenon, René. "Individualism." In *Crisis of the Modern World*. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981.
8. Guenon, René. "The Classical Prejudice", *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*. NY: Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale, 2004.
9. Guillaume, A. (Tr.) *The Life of Muhammad—A Translation of IbnIshaq's SiratRasul Allah*. Oxford, 1968.
10. Hume, David. *Essays*. Oxford, 1963.
11. Huston, Smith. *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*. Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989.
12. Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan/Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989.
13. Iqbal, Muhammad. *JavīdNāma in KulliyātiIqbal* (Persian). Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1994.
14. Koshul, Basit. "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.
15. Lewis, Bernard. *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton, 1984.
16. Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age*, London, 1984.
17. Lings, Martin. "Intellect and Reason." In *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, rpt.Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988.
18. Lopez-Baralt, *The Sufi Trobar Clus*, IAP, Lahore, 2000.
19. Lueg, Andrea. 'The Perception of Islam in Western Debate.' In JochenHippler and Andrea Lueg (eds), *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam*. London: Pluto Press, 1995.
20. Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984.

21. Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to scholasticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.
22. Mir, M. (ed.), *Iqbāl-Nāmāh*, Vol. 5, no. 3-4, (Summer and Fall, 2005): 3-6.
23. Nasr, S. H. "Knowledge and its Desacralization." In *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981.
24. Ochs, Peter. 'The God of Jews and Christians.' In Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms*. Boulder and Oxford, 2000.
25. Ophuls, William. *Requiem for Modern Politics: the tragedy of the Enlightenment and the challenge of the new millennium*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview, 1997.
26. Peters, F. E. *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol.1, Princeton, 1990.
27. Ritchie, Susan. '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 (2007): 62, 59.
28. Roxburgh, Angus. *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*. London, 2002.
29. Schleifer, S. A. 'Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History.' In *The Spirit of Palestine*. Barcelona, 1994.
30. Schuon, F. *Gnosis Divine Wisdom*. London: J. Murray, 1978.
31. Schuon, F. *Understanding Islam*, reprinted. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004.
32. Sells, Michael. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
33. Smith, Huston. *Forgotten Truth*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992
34. Sullivan, Lawrence E. *Icanchus Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions*. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
35. Wallace, Alan. *Choosing Reality*. Boston and Shaftsbury, Shambala, 1989.