Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Islam and the Plight of Modern Man

Revised and Enlarged Edition



ABC International Group, Inc.

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First published 1975

ISBN 1-930637-13-6

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. Islam and the Plight of Modern Man.

Cover Design
Liaquat Ali

The cover calligraphy is 5:120 from the Quran: It Is He Who has power over everything.

Published by
ABC International Group, Inc.

Distributed by
KAZI Publications, Inc.
3023 West Belmont Avenue
Chicago, IL 60618
(T) 773-267-7001; (F) 773-267-7002
email: info@kazi.org/www.kazi.org

For

Vali and Laili

In the Name of God The Infinitely Good, The All-Merciful

Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the earth.
The similitude of His light is as a niche
wherein is a lamp.
The lamp is in a glass.
The glass is as it were a shining star.
(This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree,
an olive neither of the East nor of the West . . .'

Quran 24:35, (Pickthall translation)

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Foreword to the New Edition

This book was first published a quarter of a century ago and since then has gone through several editions and translations. When asked by colleagues and friends to bring out a new edition, since the English edition had been out of print for many years, we decided to revise the text and add new material to the book. Every essay in the original edition has therefore been thoroughly revised and where needed updated. Furthermore, the footnotes have also been brought up to date. As for chapters 8 and 9 dealing with Islam in the Arab world and Persia, they have been completely re-done in light of certain developments since they were first written. A new post-script has been added containing two chapters dealing with Islam today and its relation to the West in a more summary and reflective fashion.

In several chapters of this book when we have spoken of Western challenges to Islam, the form of some of the challenges has changed since we first wrote about them. The most obvious case is Marxism, but the deeper underlying ideas and concepts have not by any means disappeared. We have made allusions to these changes whenever necessary and feel that what is said about the question of Islam and the plight of modern man is as true today as when we wrote about this problem, especially since we have made alterations where necessary to take into consideration currents and transformations of the last decades. When this book first appeared, it was warmly received in the Islamic world and several local editions and translations of it appeared in Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey and Indonesia.

Recently, it has been translated into Albanian and is also to appear soon in Persian. The work also received some attention from Western scholars of Islam more as a response of living Islamic thought to modernism than as a work of historical or philosophical scholarship. It was in fact precisely these two audiences that we had in mind when writing this book, namely, the Western and modern educated Muslims and serious Western students of Islam. There was of course also a third group which belongs in a sense to either the first or second of the above categories, and that is comparativists interested in either comparative religion or philosophy as far as the domain of Islam and the West is concerned.

It is our hope that the new edition will continue to be of interest to all these groups. Our aim above all else is to bring about better understanding between Islam in its traditional reality and the West without sacrificing the truth in the name of expediency. Naturally enough, we have dealt with this issue of mutual understanding in several of our other writings since it has been at the heart of our concern throughout our scholarly life. Long before people began to speak of the dialogue of civilizations we were engaged in this dialogue on the basis of the understanding of the traditional principles which have underlied all traditional civilizations and against which modernism rebelled during the European Renaissance.

Although so many of our works are concerned with this theme of cross civilizational dialogue, none deals with the seminal issue of such a dialogue as far as Islam and the West are concerned as does this book. We are therefore happy that the new and enlarged edition of Islam and the Plight of Modern Man is being published at the dawn of the year devoted to civilizational dialogue globally. We hope that this new edition will help serious Muslim thinkers to realize what dialogue with the West really involves and also for sincere Western scholars desirous to carry out dialogue with Islam to realize what are some of the basic issues for those Muslims who have been for centuries and remain today the guardians of traditional Islam as we understand the term tradition with all the depth and

breadth of meaning that it entails. We hope in any case that this book can render a humble service in bringing people of the Islamic world and the West, who are devoted to the cause of truth, closer together in the search for those principles and teaching, which constitute the heart of all authentic religions and which the modern world has chosen to ignore or forget with catastrophic consequences for not only man but the whole of the web of life on earth.

Bethesda, Maryland
Rabīᶜ al-thānī, 1421 A.H.
August, 2000 A. D.

TRANSLITERATION

Arabic Letters				
	symbol	transliteration	Long Vowels	
ء	a	ʾ		
ب	b	b	ayeh	ā ـَـ
ت	t	t	wav	ū ـُـ
ث	th	th	yeh	ī ـِـ
ج	j	j		
ح	h	ḥ	Short Vowels	
خ	kh	kh		
د	dal	d		a ـَـ
ذ	dhal	dh		u ـُـ
ر	reh	r		i ـِـ
ز	zeh	z		
س	sin	s		
ش	shin	sh		
ص	sad	ṣ		
ض	dhad	ḍ		
ط	tah	ṭ		
ظ	zad	ẓ	Persian Letters	
ع	ayn	ʿ		p پ
غ	gha	gh		ch چ
ف	f	f		zh ژ
ق	q	q		g گ
ك	k	k		
ل	l	l		
م	m	m		
ن	n	n		
ه	h	h		
و	w	w		
ي	yeh	y		
ة	ah	ah; at (construct state)		
ال	ala	(article) al- ʾl (even before the antepalatals)		

PREFACE

Gradually the inner riches of Islam and its civilization are beginning to attract a greater number of men and women in the West at the very moment when the spread of Westernization is threatening the citadel of Islam itself. This paradoxical situation calls for a new affirmation of the principles of the Islamic revelation and a restatement of the teachings contained in the branches of the tradition which issued forth from the Quranic revelation. This must be accomplished in order to present the teachings of Islam to the Western man in search of a way out of the morass within which modernism has confined him, and to the modernized Muslim in need of finding a means to combat the corrosive forces which threaten the very existence of Islamic civilization.

The present book is a humble step in this direction. We have sought to bring out the major issues which confront modern man in both East and West, to discuss means of studying the Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage today and finally to present ways of applying the teachings of the Islamic tradition to solve the plight of modern man in both the Orient and the Western world. We are not of those who believe that the negative effects of modernism in the Occident are due merely to certain deficiencies existing in Western peoples alone, or that such effects might be avoided in the East. Nor is it our aim to contrast the Islamic world with the West simply geographically, or even culturally. Our concern is rather with the Truth, with Truth as contained in tradition (*al-dīn*) and as the criterion of all human activity in either East or West in all times past, present and future; it is with Islam as the last terrestrial expres-

sion of this Truth and as a living reality, a reality which can provide the necessary criteria to judge, according to permanent and immutable archetypes beyond the confines of time and space, the thoughts and actions of men living on earth today, whether they be non-Muslim Westerners or Muslims. We feel that it is especially important at this moment when so many people in the West are becoming more seriously interested in the achievements of Islamic civilization that they should also become aware of the living nature of the Islamic tradition and its pertinence to their present-day problems. Also we feel that it is high time for modernized elements within the Islamic world to become aware of the real nature of the forces under whose influence they have fallen and to become better prepared to defend the Islamic tradition against these forces which now threaten it from within the borders of the Islamic world itself.

We have incorporated into the text of this book a certain amount of material drawn from several of our essays written during the past few years relating to the subject matter at hand. We have also been forced to repeat certain arguments which appear in some of our other writings because of the nature of the material with which we are dealing. In the exposition of traditional doctrines and their application to the present-day situation, a certain amount of repetition is in any case hardly avoidable and in fact at times necessary.

In conclusion, we wish to thank Mr. William Chittick and Mr. Peter Wilson for reviewing the text of the book and Mrs. I. Hakemi for preparing the manuscript for publication.

Tehran
20 Shaʿbān 1394 (A.H. lunar)
17 Shahrīwar 1353 (A.H. solar)
8 September 1974

Part I

The Present-day Condition of Man

CHAPTER 1
CONTEMPORARY WESTERN MAN BETWEEN THE RIM AND THE AXIS

Come you lost atoms to your Center draw,
And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:
Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide
Return, and back into your Sun subside.

Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* trans. E. Fitzgerald in his *Salāmān and Absāl*, Boston, 1899, page, 187

My Guru spake to me but one precept. He said unto me, "From without enter thou the inmost part." That to me became a rule and a precept.

Lallā, the Female Saint of Kashmir, *Lallā Vakyāni*, trans. by G. Grierson and L. D. Barrett, London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1920, page 107, para 94

Although the present work deals primarily with Islam and the Muslims, it is also concerned directly with the modern world—whose impact upon the Islamic world during the past century has brought havoc and confusion beyond comparison with anything that Islamic history has witnessed since its origin—and with the message of Islam and its significance for the contemporary West. Hence it is most appropriate to begin with the study of the situation of modern Western man, and by implication that of his imitators on other continents, a study which has become especially imperative and urgent as a result of the rapid deterioration of both modern society and the natural environment during the past few decades.

The confrontation of man's own inventions and manipula-

tions, in the form of technology, with human culture, as well as the violent effect of the application of man's acquired knowledge of nature to the destruction of the natural environment, have in fact reached such proportions that many people in the modern world, especially in the West, are at last beginning to question the validity of the conception of man held in the Occident since the rise of modern civilization. But, despite this recent awareness, in order to discuss such a vast problem in a meaningful and constructive way, one must begin by clearing the ground of the obstacles which usually prevent the profoundest questions involved from being discussed. Modern man has burned his hands in the fire which he himself kindled when he allowed himself to forget who he is. Having sold his soul in the manner of Faust to gain dominion over the natural environment, he has created a situation in which the very control of the environment is turning into its strangulation, bringing in its wake not only ecocide but also, ultimately, suicide.

The danger is now evident enough not to need repetition. Whereas only a few decades ago everyone spoke of man's unlimited possibility for development understood in a physical and materialistic sense, today many are aware of "limits to growth"—a phrase well-known in the West today—or even of an imminent cataclysm, although many others remain heedless. But the concepts and factors according to which the crisis is analyzed, the solutions sought after and even the colors with which the image of an impending doom are depicted are usually all in terms of the very elements that have brought the crisis of modern man into being. The world is still seen by the forces and elements that govern it as devoid of a spiritual horizon, not because there is no such horizon present, but because he who views the contemporary landscape is most often the man who lives at the rim of the wheel of existence and therefore views all things from the periphery. He remains indifferent to the spokes and completely oblivious of the axis and the Center, which nevertheless remain ever accessible to him through them.

The problem of the devastation brought upon the environment by technology, the ecological crisis and the like, all issue from the malady of amnesia or forgetfulness from which mod-

ern as well as post modern man suffer. Modern man has simply forgotten who he is. Living on the periphery of his own circle of existence, he has been able to gain a qualitatively superficial but quantitatively staggering knowledge of the world. He has projected the externalized and superficial image of himself upon the world.[1] And then, having come to know the world in such externalized terms, he has sought to reconstruct an image of himself based upon this external knowledge. There has been a series of "falls" by means of which man has oscillated in a descending scale between an ever more externalized image of himself and of the world surrounding him, moving ever further from the Center both of himself and of his cosmic environment. The inner history of the so called development of modern Western man from his historic background as traditional man—who represents at once his ancestor in time and his center in space—is a gradual alienation from the Center and the axis through the spokes of the wheel of existence to the rim, where modern man resides. But just as the existence of the rim presupposes spokes which connect it to the axis of the wheel, so does the very fact of human existence imply the presence of the Center and the axis and hence an inevitable connection of men of all ages with Man in his primordial and eternal reality as he has been, is, and will continue to be, above all outward changes and transformations.[2]

Nowhere is the tendency of modern man to seek the solution of many problems without considering the factors that have caused these problems in the first place more evident than in the field of the humanities in general and the sciences dealing specifically with man, which are supposed to provide an insight into human nature, in particular. Modern man, having rebelled against Heaven, has created a science based not on the light of the Intellect[3]—as we see in the traditional Islamic sciences—but on the powers of human reason to sift the data of the senses. But the success of this science was so great in its own domain that soon all the other sciences began to ape it, leading to the crass positivism of the past century which caused philosophy as perennially understood to become confused with logical analysis, mental acrobatics or even mere information theory,

and the classical fields of the humanities to become converted to quantified social sciences which make even the intuitions of literature about the nature of man inaccessible to many students and seekers today. A number of scientists are in fact among those most critical of the pseudo-humanities being taught in many Western universities in an atmosphere of a psychological and mental sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the sciences of nature and mathematics, a "humanities" which tries desperately to become "scientific," only to degenerate into a state of superficiality, not to say triviality.[4] The decadence of the humanities in modern times is caused by man's loss of the direct knowledge of himself and also of the Self that he has always had, and by reliance upon an externalized, indirect knowledge of himself which he seeks to gain from the outside, a literally "superficial" knowledge that is drawn from the rim and is devoid of an awareness of inferiority, of the axis of the wheel and of the spokes which stand always before man and connect him like a ray of light to the supernal sun.

This decadence has become even more accentuated in recent years with the rise of post-modernism and deconstruction which hold so much sway in the field of humanities in America and much of Europe. Post-modernism in rebelling against modernism does so from below and marks a further stage in the downward spiral of the humanities seen from the point of view of traditional doctrines concerning man and sciences and arts pertaining to him.

It is with a consideration of this background that certain questions created by the confrontation between the traditional concept of man and the "scientific" as well as post-modern concepts must be analyzed and answered. The first of these questions that often arise in people's minds is "What is the relation of piecemeal scientific evidence about human behavior to what has been called traditionally "human nature?" In order to answer this question it is essential to remember that the reality of the human state cannot be exhausted by any of its outward projections. A particular human action or behavior as well as thought always reflect, a state of being, and its study can lead to a certain kind of knowledge of the state of being of the agent

provided there is already an awareness of the whole to which the fragment can be related. Fragmented knowledge of human behavior is related to human nature in the same way that waves are related to the sea. There is certainly a relationship between them that is both causal and substantial. But unless one has had a vision of the sea in its vastness and illimitable horizons—the sea which reflects the Infinite and its inimitable peace and calm—one cannot gain an essential knowledge of it through the study of its waves. Fragmented knowledge can be related to the whole only when there is already an intellectual vision of the whole.

The careful "scientific" study of fragmented human behavior is incapable of revealing the profounder aspect of human nature precisely because of the suffocating limitation that so many branches of the modern behavioristic sciences of man—veritable pseudo-sciences if there ever were any[5]—have placed on the meaning of the human state itself. There has never been as little knowledge of man, of the anthropos, in different human cultures as one finds among most modern anthropologists today. Even the medicine men of Africa (not to speak of the Muslim sages) have had a deeper insight into human nature than the modern behaviorists and their flock, because the former have been concerned with the essential and the latter with the accidental. The same can of course be said of those post-modern thinkers who deny that human nature has an essential reality and also identify the essential with the accidental.

Now, accidents do possess a reality, but they have a meaning only in relation to the substance which supports them ontologically. Otherwise one could collect accidents and external facts indefinitely without ever reaching the substance, or what is essential. The classical error of modern civilization, to mistake the quantitative accumulation of information for qualitative penetration into the inner meaning of things, applies here as elsewhere. The study of fragmented behavior without a vision of the human nature which is the cause of this behavior cannot itself lead to a knowledge of human nature. It can go around the rim of the wheel indefinitely without ever entering on the spoke to approach the proximity of the axis and the

Center. But if the vision is already present, the gaining of knowledge of external human behavior can always be an occasion for recollection and a return to the cause by means of the external effect.

In Islamic metaphysics, four basic qualities are attributed to Ultimate Reality, based directly on the Quranic verse, "He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward" (57:3). This attribution, besides other levels of meaning, also has a meaning that is directly pertinent to the present argument. God, the Ultimate Reality, is both the Inward (*al-Bāṭin*) and the Outward (*al-Ẓāhir*), the Center and the Circumference. The religious man sees God as the Inward; the profane man who has become completely oblivious to the world of the Spirit sees only the Outward, but precisely because of his ignorance of the Center does not realize that even the outward is a manifestation of the Center or of the Divine. Hence his fragmented knowledge remains incapable of encompassing the whole of the rim or circumference and therefore, by anticipation, the Center. A segment of the rim remains nothing more than a figure without a point of reference or Center, but the whole rim cannot but reflect the Center. Finally the sage sees God as both the Inward and the Outward. He is able to relate the fragmented external knowledge to the Center and see in the rim a reflection of the Center. But this he is able to do only because of his a priori awareness of the Center. Before being able to see the external world—be it the physical world about us or the outer crust of the human psyche—as a manifestation of the Inward, one must already have become attached to the Inward through faith and knowledge.[6] Applying this principle, the sage could thus relate fragmented knowledge to the deeper layers of human nature; but for one who has yet to become aware of the Inward dimension within himself and the Universe about him, fragmented knowledge cannot but remain fragmentary, especially if it is based on observation of the behavior of a human collectivity most of whose members themselves live only on the outermost layers of human existence and rarely reflect in their behavior the deeper dimension of their own being.

This last point leads to an observation that complements

the discussion of principles already stated. Western man lives for the most part in a world in which he encounters few people who live on the higher planes of consciousness or in the deeper layers of their being. He is therefore, for the most part, aware of only certain types of human behavior, as can be readily seen in the writings of most Western social scientists, especially when they make studies of such traditions as Islam. Fragmented knowledge of human behavior, even if based solely on external observation, could aid modern man to become at least indirectly aware of other dimensions of human nature, provided a study is made of the behavior of traditional man—of the man who lives in a world with a Center. The behavior of traditional men of different societies, especially at the highest level of the saints and sages—be they from the Chinese, the Islamic, the North American Indian or any other traditional background—in the face of great trials, before death, in presence of the beauty of virgin nature and sacred art, or in the throes of love both human and divine, can certainly provide indications of aspects of human nature for the modern observer. Such behavior can reveal a constancy and permanence within human nature that is truly astonishing and can also be instrumental in depicting the grandeur of man, which has been largely forgotten in a world where he has become a prisoner to the pettiness of his own trivial creations and inventions. Seen in this light, a fragmented knowledge of human behavior can aid in gaining a knowledge of certain aspects of human nature. But in any case a total knowledge of this nature cannot be achieved except through a knowledge of the Center or axis, which also "contains" the spokes and the rim. A famous saying of the Prophet of Islam states, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." But precisely because "himself" implies the Self which resides at the Center of man's being, from another point of view this statement can also be reversed. Man can know himself completely only in the light of God, for the relative cannot be known save with respect to the Absolute.

The second query which is often posed today and to which we must address ourselves concerns the relationship of scientific "objectivity" and its findings to the criteria of the universal

and unchanging implied by the phrase "human nature" as used traditionally. To answer this query, it is necessary before all else to define once again what is meant by scientific objectivity, especially when it concerns the study of man. It has become commonplace, at least for non-specialists in the philosophy of science, to attribute objectivity to modern science almost as if the one implied the other. No doubt modern science possesses a limited form of objectivity in its study of the physical world, but even in this domain its objectivity is encompassed by the collective subjectivity of a particular humanity at a certain moment of its historical existence when the symbolist spirit has become atrophied and the gift of seeing the world of the Spirit through and beyond the physical world has been almost completely lost. Certainly what the traditional Muslim sees "objectively" is not the same as the vision of the world seen by modern men today "objectively" but without the dimension of Transcendence. Even in the physical world, all that cannot be caught in the net of modern science (to quote the well-known image of Sir Arthur Eddington) is collectively neglected, and its nonexistence "objectively" avowed. It is as if an audience of deaf people at a concert testified together that they did not hear any music and considered the unanimity of their opinion as a proof of its objectivity.

Now if, in the domain of the physical world itself, the concept of the so-called "objectivity" of modern science must be employed with great prudence and the qualitative and symbolic aspects of nature not neglected because they lie outside the "objectively" defined world view of modern science, so much more does this "objectivity" need to be reconsidered in the field of the study of man. The aping of the methods of the physical sciences in the study of man has enabled Western scientists to gather a great deal of information about men of all ages and climes, but little about man himself, for the simple reason that the philosophical background of modern science, ultimately Cartesian, is incapable of providing the necessary background for the study of man. Already in the seventeenth century the mind-body dualism of Descartes perverted in the European mind the image of the much more profound tripartite division

of the being of man—corpus, anima and spiritus—expounded so fully in the Hermetic tradition in the West and repeated so often in works of Islamic philosophy. To this error a worse illusion was added in the nineteenth century which prevented even the collecting of facts about men of different ages from becoming a way of reaching at least some form of knowledge of man himself.

This illusion is that of evolution as it is usually understood today. Evolution is no more than a scientific hypothesis that has been parading itself for the past century as a scientific fact; despite the lack of the least proof of its having taken place in the biological plane, it is usually taught in schools as proven. The present discussion does not allow our entering into debate about biological evolution, although writings by biologists and geologists against it, especially works written in recent years, are far from few in number.[7] But as far as the study of man is concerned, it is precisely the intrusion of the idea of evolution into anthropology that has made the potentially positive relation of scientifically accumulated facts to an understanding of the universal and unchanging aspect of human nature well-nigh impossible. Western scientists and scholars in the fields of anthropology, the social sciences, and even the humanities are trained almost completely to study only change. Any alteration, no matter how trivial, is more often than not considered as a significant change, while the immutable is almost unconsciously identified with the unimportant or the dead. It is as if man were trained to study only the movement of clouds and to remain completely oblivious of the sky, with its immutable and infinite expanses, which provides the framework for the observations of the cloud movements. No wonder that so much of the study of man provided by modern disciplines is really no more than a study of triviality, producing most often petty results and failing at almost every step to predict anything of significance in the social order. Many a simple traditional folk tale reveals more about man than thick tomes with pages of statistics on what are usually described as "vital changes." In fact the only vital change that is occurring today is the ever greater alien-

ation of man from his own permanent nature and a forgetfulness of this nature, a forgetfulness which cannot but be transitory but is bound at the same time to have catastrophic effects upon that type of man who has chosen it. But this is precisely the one change which "objective" scientific methods are incapable of studying.

Yet, in principle, there is no necessary contradiction between scientific facts accumulated objectively and the concept of human nature with its permanent and universal implications. Were the impediments of that mental deformation called evolutionary thinking, which is neither objective nor scientific, to be removed, the accumulation of facts about man would display in a blindingly evident fashion the extra-spatial and extra-temporal character of man, if not beyond history—for this would lie beyond the reach of facts—at least in periods of history and in various regions of the world. Such an exercise would depict human nature as something constant and permanent (that nature to which the Noble Quran refers as *al-fiṭrah*), from which at certain moments of history and among certain peoples there have been deviations and departures that have soon been corrected by tragedies or catastrophes leading to a reestablishment of the norm. Sacred books such as the Quran contain, besides other levels of meaning, a history of the human soul which emphasizes in a majestic fashion this conception of human nature.[8] That is why the goal that is placed before man in all sacred books is to know and to return to the norm, to man's permanent and original nature, to the *fiṭrah*. As the Tao-Te Ching (XIX) states, "Realize thy Simple Self. Embrace thy Original Nature." For the goal of man cannot but be the knowledge of himself, of who he is.

> He who knows others is wise;
> He who knows himself is enlightened.
>
> Tao-Te Ching, XXXIII

Or, to quote a mediaeval Western contemplative,

> If the mind would fain ascend to the height of Science,
> let its first and principal study be to know itself.
>
> Richard of St. Victor

In the light of the understanding which both revelation and intellectual vision have provided over the ages concerning the nature of man, the answer to the often posed question "Can scientific knowledge capture something essential about man?" can only be the following: We cannot gain an essential knowledge of man through any method that is based on an externalization of man's inner being and the placing of this externalized man, of the man who stands at the rim of the wheel of existence, as the subject that knows. If "essential" has any meaning at all it must be related to the essence, to the Center or axis which at once generates the spokes and the rim. Only the higher can comprehend the lower, for "to comprehend" means literally "to encompass," and only that which stands on a higher level of existence can encompass that which lies below it. Man is composed of body, psyche and intellect, the last being at once above man and at the center of his being. The essence of man, that which is essential to human nature, can be understood only by the intellect, through the "eye of the heart" (*ʿayn al-qalb* in Arabic or *chishm-i dil* in Persian) as traditionally understood, the intellect which is at once at the center of man's being and encompasses all the other levels of his existence. Once the eye of the heart becomes closed and the faculty of intellection, in its original sense, atrophied, it is not possible to gain an essential knowledge of man. That reflection of the intellect upon the plane of the psyche and the mind which is called reason can never reach the essence of man, nor for that matter the essence of anything else, no matter how much it concerns itself with experiment and observation or how far it carries out its proper function of division and analysis, the legitimate and rightful function of ratio. It can gain peripheral knowledge of accidents, of effects, of external behavior, but not of the essence. Reason, once divorced from the guiding light of the intellect, can at best confirm the existence of the noumena, of the reality of the essences of things, as we see in the philosophy of Kant, who,

having limited intellect to reason, accepted the reality of noumena but denied the possibility of ever knowing them in themselves. Yes, reason alone cannot know the essences of things or the noumena in themselves. The knowledge that is essential is one that is ultimately based on the identity of the knower and the known, on the known being consumed by the fire of knowledge itself.

Man is at a particular vantage point to know one thing in essence, and that is himself, were he only to overcome the illusion of taking (to use Vedantic terms) the externalized and objectivized image of himself for his real Self, the Self which cannot be externalized because of its very nature. Scientific knowledge, like any other form of knowledge which is based by definition on the unsurmountable distinction between a subject that knows and an object that is known, must of necessity remain content with a knowledge that is peripheral and not essential.

One is naturally led to ask what is the relationship of particular scientific research in the modern sense to the quest for other kinds of knowledge about mankind in general. A relation of a legitimate and meaningful kind can exist— as seen in the Islamic sciences—provided the correct proportion and relation between ways of knowing is kept in mind. And that is possible only if a knowledge that transcends science, as currently understood, is accepted. The rim can serve as a point of access to the Center and the axis only if it is taken for what it really is, namely the rim. Once the fact that the rim is the periphery is forgotten, the Center also ceases to possess meaning and becomes inaccessible. Were a true metaphysics, a scientia sacra, to become once again a living reality in the West, knowledge gained of man through scientific research could be integrated into a pattern which would also embrace other forms of knowledge ranging from the purely metaphysical to those derived from traditional schools of psychology and cosmology.

But in the field of the sciences of man, as in that of the sciences of nature, the great impediment is precisely the monolithic and monopolistic character which modern Western science

has displayed since the seventeenth century. Putting aside the great deal of pseudo-science and simply erroneous theories prevalent in the modern sciences of man such as anthropology and psychology, the elements that are based on careful observation of human behavior or the human psyche under different circumstances could be related, without any logical contradictions, to what traditional schools of psychology, such as those found in Sufism, or Yoga, or Zen, have also discovered about the human psyche, and especially about certain aspects of it totally unknown to most of our contemporaries.[9] But to relate these elements to traditional schools is possible only if the doctrine of man in his totality, as expounded in traditional metaphysics—the "Universal Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of Islamic esoterism—is accepted, for as already stated, only the greater can embrace the lesser. To claim to know the human psyche without the aid of the Spirit (or the Intellect) and to claim a finality for this knowledge as "truly scientific," independent of any other form of knowledge, cannot but result in the very impasse which in fact the modern world faces today. It can only end in a truncated and incomplete, not to say outright erroneous, "science of man," which is asked to play a role for which it has no competence. Such a science is most often more dangerous than ignorance pure and simple, for there is nothing more dangerous than simple ignorance except an ignorance which has pretensions to being knowledge and wisdom.

Scientific research into the nature of man can possess a constructive relationship to the universal and perennial ways of knowing man only if it realizes its own limitations and does not seek to transgress them. It can be legitimate only if it is able to overcome the "totalitarian rationalism" inherent in modern science[10]—even though not accepted by many scientists—and to assent to become what it really is, namely a limited and particular way of knowing things through the observation of their external aspects, their phenomena, and of ratiocination based upon this empirical contact with things; a way that would be acceptable if taken for what it is, because things do also possess a face turned toward the external and the exteriorized.

The answer to the question concerning the worth of scien-

tific research as a source of universal or essential knowledge about man—research which is being aped everywhere in the world today—must then be that it is worthless if considered as a source. How can a knowledge which negates the universal order in the metaphysical sense and denies the possibility of essential knowledge serve as the source of a knowledge that is essential and universal? Scientific research can become a source of essential knowledge only under the condition that "scientific" is understood in the traditional sense as the Islamic *al-ʿilm*, as a knowledge that issues from and leads to the principial order.

There is, however, one way in which scientific research can aid in gaining an awareness of something essential about the present predicament of modern man, if not of man's eternal nature. This is to make use of the experimental method employed by science to study modern scientific and industrial civilization itself. In science, whenever an experiment does not succeed, it is discontinued, no matter how much effort has been put into it, and an attempt is made to learn from the errors which were responsible for its lack of success.

Modern civilization as it has developed in the West since the Renaissance is an experiment that has failed[11]—failed in such an abysmal fashion as to cast doubt upon the very possibility of any future for man to seek other ways. It would be most unscientific today to consider this civilization, with all the presumptions about the nature of man and the Universe which lie at its basis, as anything other than a failed experiment. And in fact scientific research, if not atrophied by that totalitarian reign of rationalism and empiricism alluded to above, should be the easiest way of enabling contemporary man to realize that modern civilization has failed precisely because the premises upon which it has been based were false, because this civilization has been based on a concept of man which excludes what is most essential to the human state.

Paradoxically enough, the awareness of the shortcomings of modern civilization has dawned upon the general Western public—and not upon a small intellectual elite of the kind that warned of the crisis facing the modern world as far back as half

a century ago[12]—not because of a sudden realization of man's forgotten nature, but because of the rapid decay of the natural environment. It is a symptom of the mentality of modern man that the deep spiritual crisis which has been causing the very roots of his soul gradually to wither away had to come to his attention through a crisis within the physical environment.

During the past few years, so much has been written about the environmental and ecological crisis that there is no need here to emphasize the dimensions of the problems involved. A large number of studies have appeared in both Europe and America which have sought to apply the very methods of modern science to a study of the effects of the application of this science in the future. The authors of such works, along with many others seriously concerned with the environmental crisis, have proposed a change in man's concept of growth, a return to non-material pursuits, a satisfaction with fewer material objects and many other well-meaning suggestions for change. But very few have realized that the pollution of the environment is no more than the after-effect of a pollution of the human soul which came into being the moment Western man decided to play the role of the Divinity upon the surface of the earth and chose to exclude the transcendent dimension from his life.[13]

In this late hour of human history, we observe two tragedies, one in the West and the other in the East. In the Occident, where the crisis of modern civilization—a crisis which is after all the product of the West—is most fully felt, since it is related usually to social breakdown and the environmental crisis, solutions are proposed which contain the very factors that led to the crisis in the first place. Men are asked to discipline their passions, to be rational humanists, to be considerate to their neighbors, both human and non-human. But few realize that these injunctions are impossible to carry out as long as there is no spiritual power to curb the infernal and passionate tendencies of the human soul. It is the very humanistic conception of man that has dragged him to the infra-human. It is as a result of an ignorance of what man is, of the possibilities of the depths of darkness as well as the heights of illumination that he carries within himself, that such facile solutions are proposed. For mil-

lennia religions have taught men to avoid evil and to cultivate virtue. Modern man sought to destroy first the power of religion over his soul and then to question even the meaning of evil and sin. Now many propose as a solution to the environmental crisis a return to traditional virtues, although usually they do not describe the virtues in such terms because for the most part such people remain secular and propose that the life of men should continue to be divorced from the sacred.

It might be said that the environmental crisis, as well as the psychological unbalance of so many men and women in the modern world, the ugliness of the urban environment and the like are the results of the attempt of man to live by bread alone, to "kill all the gods" and announce his independence of Heaven. But man cannot escape the effect of his actions, which are themselves the fruit of his present state of being. His only hope is to cease to be the rebellious creature he has become, to make peace with both Heaven and earth and to submit himself to the Divine. This itself would be tantamount to ceasing to be modern as this term is usually understood, to a death and a rebirth. That is why this dimension of the problem is rarely considered in general discussions of the environmental crisis. The missing dimension of the ecological debate is the role and nature of man himself and the spiritual transformation he must undergo if he is to solve the crisis he himself has precipitated.

The second tragedy, occurring in the East in general and the Islamic world in particular, is that this world is for the most part repeating the very errors which have led to the failure in the West of urban-industrial society and the modern civilization that has produced it. The attitude of the East towards the West should be to view it as a case study to learn from rather than as a model to emulate blindly. Of course the politico-economic and military pressures from the industrialized world upon the non-Western world are so great as to make many decisions impossible and many choices well-nigh excluded. But there is no excuse for committing certain acts whose negative results are obvious, or for having no better reason for undertaking this or that project than the fact that it has been carried out in the West. The

earth cannot support additional mistakes of the kind committed by Western civilization. It is therefore most unfortunate that no present-day power on earth has a perspective wide enough to keep the well-being of the whole earth and its inhabitants in mind.

Of these two tragedies, certainly the first overshadows the second, for it is action carried out in the modernized, industrialized world that affects more directly the rest of the globe. For example, were the ecological crisis really to be taken seriously by any of the major industrial powers in their economic and technological policies rather than just in verbal statements, it would have an immeasurable influence upon those who of necessity emulate these powers in such fields. How different would the future of man be if the West were to remember again who man is, before the East forgets the knowledge it has preserved over the ages about man's real nature.

What contemporary man needs, amidst this morass of confusion and disorder of the mental and physical world which surrounds him, is first and foremost a message that comes from the Center and defines the rim vis-à-vis the Center. This message is still available in a living form in the Eastern traditions such as Islam and can be resuscitated within the Western world. But wherever this message be found, whether in the East or the West, if it issues from the Center, which is neither of the East nor of the West, it is always a call for man who lives on the periphery and the rim of the wheel of existence to follow the spokes to the Center and thus be able to ascend the axial pole symbolizing the transcendent, the Center being the origin at once of himself and of all things in the human world and means of access to the Beyond. It is a call for man to realize who he is and to become aware of that spark of eternity which he contains within himself.

> There is in every man an incorruptible star, a substance called upon to become crystallized in Immortality; it is eternally prefigured in the luminous proximity of the Self. Man disengages this star from its temporal entanglements in truth,

in prayer and in virtue, and in them alone.[14]

He who has crystallized this star within himself is at peace with both himself and the world. Only in seeking to transcend the world and to become a star in the spiritual firmament is man able to live in harmony with the world and to solve the problems that terrestrial existence by its very nature imposes upon him during this fleeting journey in the temporal which comprises his life on earth.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. It must be remembered that, in the West, man first rebelled against Heaven with the humanism of the Renaissance; only later did the modern sciences come into being. The humanistic anthropology of the Renaissance was a necessary background for the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century and the creation of a science which although in one sense non-human, is in another sense the most anthropomorphic form of knowledge possible, for it makes human reason and the empirical data based upon the human senses the sole criteria for the validity of all knowledge.

Concerning the gradual disfiguration of the image of man in the West, see G. Durand, "Defiguration philosophique et figure traditionnelle de l'homme en Occident," Eranos-Jahrbuch, XXXVIII, 1971, pp. 45-93; Ph. Sherrard, The Rape of Man and Nature, Ipswich (UK), Golgonooza Press, 1987, Chap. 2 and 3, pp. 42-89; and S. H. Nasr, Knowledge and the Sacred, Albany (NY), the State University of New York Press, 1989, Chap. 5, pp. 160-188. For a treatment of this subject from the perspective of a Western seeker who has turned to traditional Islam see J. Herlihy, The Search of the Truth—Contemporary Reflections on Traditional Islamic Themes, Kuala Lumpur, Devan Pustaka Islam, 1990.

2. If such a relation did not exist, it would not even be possible for man to identify himself with other periods of human history, much less for the permanent aspects of human nature to manifest themselves even in the modern world as they have in the past and continue to do so today.

3. Throughout this book the word "intellect" is used in its original Latin sense as intellectus or the Greek nous, which stands above reason and is able to gain knowledge directly and immediately. Reason is only the reflection of the intellect upon the mirror of the human mind.

4. There is little more pathetic in this type of pseudo-humanities than the attempt now being made in some Islamic countries to introduce this decadence into the very bosom of Islamic culture in the name of progress.

Certain American scholars such as William Arrowsmith and William Thompson have already criticized what could be called the "pollution of the humanities," but the tendency in this field as in the question of the pollution of the environment is mostly to try to remove the ill effects without curing the underlying causes. If anything, this "pollution" has increased with the introduction of a number of post-

modern ideas into the field of the humanities.

5. In modern times, the occult sciences, whose metaphysical principles have been forgotten, have become known as the "pseudo-sciences," while in reality they contain a profound doctrine concerning the nature of man and the cosmos, provided their symbolism is understood. Much of the social and human sciences today on the contrary veil and hide with a scientific garb a total ignorance of human nature and are, in a sense, the reverse of the occult sciences. Hence they deserve much more than the occult sciences the title of "pseudo-science."

6. This theme is thoroughly analyzed by F. Schuon in his Dimensions of Islam, trans. by P. Townsend, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970, Chapter 2. Concerning the sage or the Sufi, he writes: "The Sufi lives under the gaze of *al-Awwal* (the First), *al-Ākhir* (the Last), *al-Ẓāhir* (the Outward) and *al-Bāṭin* (the Inward). He lives concretely in these metaphysical dimensions as ordinary creatures move in space and time, and as he himself moves in so far as he is a mortal creature. He is consciously the point of intersection where the Divine dimensions meet, unequivocally engaged in the universal drama, he suffers no illusions about impossible avenues of escape, and he never situates himself in the fallacious "extraterritoriality" of the profane, who imagine that they can live outside spiritual Reality, the only reality there is." pp. 36-37.

7. See, for example, L. Bounoure, Déterminisme et finalité, double loi de la vie, Paris, Flammarion, 1957; his Recherche d'une doctrine de la vie, Paris, R. Laffont, 1964; E. Shute, Flaws in the Theory of Evolution, Nutley (NJ), Craig Press, 1976; and D. Dewar, The Transformist Illusion, Murfreesboro, Dehoff Publications, 1957; O. Bakar (ed.), Critique of Evolutionary Theory, Kuala Lumpur, The Islamic Academy of Science, 1987; G. Sermonti and R. Fonti, Dopo Darwin: Critica all'evoluzionismo, Milan, Rusconi, 1980; and M. J. Behe, Darwin's Black Box, New York, The Free Press, 1996. See also S. H. Nasr, Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, Chicago (IL), Kazi Publications, 1997, pp. 124 ff., where works and views opposed to evolution are discussed.

8. For the episodes of the Ḳuran considered as events of the human soul and its inner "history," see F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, trans. by D. M. Matheson, Bloomington (IN), World Wisdom Books, 1994, Chap. 2, pp. 39-93.

9. Unfortunately very few serious studies based on the traditional

point of view, which alone matters, have as yet been made of the traditional psychological sciences of the various Oriental traditions, sciences which can be understood only in the light of metaphysical principles and can be practiced only with the aid of the spiritual grace present in a living tradition. See A. K. Coomaraswamy, "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or rather Pneumatology," in Selected Writings of Ananda R. Coomaraswamy, ed. by R. Lipsey, vol. 2, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 333-378. As far as Sufi psychology s concerned, see L. Bakhtiar, God's Will Be Done, 3 vols., Chicago (IL), Kazi Publications, 1994; R. Frager, Heart, Self and Soul, Wheaton (IL), Quest Books, 1949; L. Wilcox, Sufism and Psychology, Chicago (IL), Abjad Books, 1995; M. Shafii, Freedom from the Self, New York, Human Sciences Press, 1985; and M. Ajmal, "Sufi Science of the Soul," in S. H. Nasr (ed.), Islamic Spirituality I: Foundations, New York, Crossroad Publications, 1987, pp. 294-307.

10. F. Schuon, Light on the Ancient Worlds, trans. by Lord Northbourne, London, 1965, p. 117.

11. "But, properly, urban-industrialism must be regarded as an experiment. And if the scientific spirit has taught us anything of value, it is that honest experiments may well fail. When they do, there must be a radical reconsideration, one which does not flinch even at the prospect of abandoning the project. Surely, as of the mid-twentieth century, urban-industrialism is proving to be such a failed experiment, bringing in its wake every evil that progress was meant to vanquish." T. Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society, Berkeley (CA), Celestial Arts, 1989, p. xxiv of introduction.

12. Such men as R. Guénon in his Crisis of the Modern World, trans. by M. Pallis and R. Nicholson, Ghent (NY), Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 1996, whose original French edition first appeared in 1927 followed by other traditional authors, especially F. Schuon and A. K. Coomaraswamy, have written extensively during the past few decades on the crisis of the West on the basis of the application of perennial metaphysical criteria to the contemporary situation. But their writings were ignored in academic circles for a long time and continue to be so to a large extent even today. The crisis had to appear on the physical level in order to bring the dangerous tendencies of modern civilization before the eyes of modern men.

13. We have dealt with this theme extensively in our Man and Nature: the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man. "What, after all, is the

ecological crisis that now captures so much belated attention but the inevitable extroversion of a blighted psyche? Like inside, like outside. In the eleventh hour, the very physical environment suddenly looms up before us as the outward mirror of our inner condition, for many the first discernible symptom of advanced disease within." T. Roszak, op. cit., p. xvii of introduction.

14. F. Schuon, Light on the Ancient Worlds, trans. Lord Northbourne, Bloomington (IN), World Wisdom Books, 1984, p. 117.

CHAPTER 2
THE DILEMMA OF THE PRESENT-DAY MUSLIM

> And it (the resurrection) will not take place until you see affairs which will cause you to ask one another whether your Prophet has mentioned anything concerning them, and until the mountains will be displaced from their stations.
>
> (Prophetic *ḥadīth*)

When we turn to the contemporary Muslim as he finds himself in today's world, we discover that although his problems are not identical with those of Western man, he too lives in a situation which presents him with numerous difficulties, one which puts his faith (*īmān*) to the most arduous test possible. One can find in the Islamic world today a full spectrum of people ranging from purely traditional elements, through those who are caught between traditional values and modernism, to so-called fundamentalism, to the blatant modernists who nevertheless still move within the Islamic orbit, and finally to the few who no longer consider themselves to belong to the Islamic universe at all.[1] With this latter group we are not concerned, for they can no longer be considered as the representative of homo islamicus who is the subject of our present discussion, although they, too, often return finally to the Islamic pattern of things. It is the *īmān* of the other groups, who already possess faith in one degree or another, that is put to the test in a world which makes the real appear illusory and the illusory real, a world which seduces men into believing that

spiritual reality—the only reality there is—is outmoded in comparison with a supposedly "real" world which is dissolving before the bewildered eyes of modern man like sand running through his fingers.

The major difference between the contemporary Muslim and his Western counterpart is that the former, in contrast to the latter, lives in a society where the Center is still visible and therefore the rim can also be seen for what it really is.[2] He lives in a world where the transcendent dimension is still present, where the majority of men still perform their religious rites and duties, where the Divine Law or *Sharīᶜah* is still considered to be the ultimate law, even if not fully practiced by everyone, and where the figure of the saint and sage is still a living one, although now perhaps less easy to find than before. There is also the basic difference that the contemporary Muslim knows less about the modern world than does Western man, that his intelligence has been tested in fewer ways and that he has not in general developed the kind of discernment found among those in the West who have rediscovered tradition and by the same token come to know the real nature of the modern world. The situation of contemporary Muslims, like that of other Orientals in general, is also in one aspect more difficult than that of Western man in that changes now taking place in the East are more pernicious because of the reality of the still existing tradition and usually more devastating. In a sense, the West has little more of traditional character to lose to the onslaught of modernism, except what survives of traditional religion, whereas there are still many things of spiritual value in the East which are being threatened every day, whether by means of books, the radio and television or the bulldozer. The contemporary Muslim must and cannot but wage a continuous holy struggle (*jihād*), not only within himself to keep his mind and soul healthy and intact, but also outwardly to protect what he can of the marvellous spiritual and artistic heritage his forefathers have bequeathed him in the expectation that he too will preserve and transmit it to the next generation. In this sense then, that he is being pulled by the forces of the Islamic tradi-

tion on the one hand and of secularism and modernism on the other, the contemporary Muslim, especially of the class thoroughly influenced by the modern world, may also be said to be situated between the rim and the axis, although his "existential" situation differs from that of Western man in secularized postindustrial society because of the different elements which have conditioned his mind and soul.

The contemporary Muslim who lives in the far corners of the Islamic world and has remained isolated and secluded from the influence of modernism may be said to live still within a homogeneous world in which the tensions of life are those of normal human existence. But the Muslim who lives in the centers of the Islamic world touched in one degree or another by modernism lives within a polarized field of tension created by two contending world views and systems of values. This tension is often reflected within his mind and soul, and he usually becomes a house divided against itself, in profound need of reintegration. If he is of an intellectual bent, he sees on one side the rich intellectual heritage of Islam as a still-living reality, a heritage which is precisely a message from the Center and a guide for man in his journey from the rim to the Center. It is a world view based on the supremacy of the blinding reality of God before whom all creatures are literally nothing, and then on the hierarchic Universe issuing from His Command (*amr*) and comprising the multiple levels of being from the archangelic world to the level of material existence.[3] It is a Weltanschauung based on viewing man as the "image of God" (*khalaqa ʾLlāhu Ādama ʿalā ṣūratihi*)[4], as God's vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth but also as His perfect servant (*ʿabd*) obeying His every command. It is based on the idea that all phenomena in the world of nature are symbols reflecting divine realities and that all things move according to His Will and their spiritual nature (*malakūt*), which is in His Hands.[5] It is based on the conception that only the law of God, the *Sharīʿah*, has ultimate claim upon the allegiance and respect of men and that it alone can provide for their felicity in its true sense.

On the other side and in contrast to this world view, the con-

temporary Muslim sees the basic assumptions of modern Western civilization, nearly all of which are the very antithesis of the Islamic principles he cherishes. He sees philosophies based either on man considered as a creature in rebellion against Heaven or on the human collectivity seen as an ant-heap in which man has no dignity worthy of his real nature. He sees the Universe reduced to a single level of reality—the spatio-temporal complex of matter and energy—and all the higher levels of reality relegated to the category of old wives' tales or—at best—images drawn from the collective unconscious. He sees the power of man as ruler upon the earth emphasized at the expense of his servanthood so that he is considered to be not the *khalīfat Allāh*, the vicegerent of God, but the *khalīfah* of his own ego[6] or of some worldly power or collectivity. He sees the theomorphic nature of man either mutilated or openly negated. He reads the arguments of Western philosophers and scientists against the symbolic concept of nature, a concept which is usually debased by being called "totemistic" or "animistic" or some other term of that genre, usually loaded with pejorative connotations. He is, in fact, made to believe that the transformation from seeing the phenomena of nature as the portents or signs (*āyāt*) of God to viewing these phenomena as brute facts is a major act of progress which, however, only prepares nature for that ferocious rape and plunder for which modern man is now beginning to pay so dearly. Finally, the contemporary Muslim is taught to believe that the law is nothing but a convenient agreement within a human collectivity and therefore relative and ever-changing, with the implication that there is no such thing as a Divine Law which serves as the immutable norm of human action and which provides the measures against which man can judge his own ethical standards objectively.

These and many other intellectual and philosophical questions beset constantly the mind of that contemporary Muslim who is touched in one degree or another by the influence of modernism. Not all the questions present themselves with the same force to everyone, nor is every modernized Muslim modernized to the same degree. For this reason the dilemma of

every contemporary Muslim is not the same. But, nevertheless, the tension between two world views of a contradictory nature is to be observed widely, the kind and degree of tension differing, of course, from one milieu and even one individual to another.

The same confrontation of world views and the same dilemma is also to be observed in other domains. In education—in its universal sense as the most important means of transmitting the tradition from one generation to another—again two contending systems vie with each other, with the contemporary Muslim caught in between. On the one hand, there are the classical channels of education ranging from the laps of grandparents and parents to Quranic schools (*maktab*s) to traditional universities (*madrasah*s) to Sufi centers (*khānqāh*s or *zāwiyah*s), not to speak of ateliers and guild centers where the arts and crafts are taught. On the other hand, there are radio and television programmes mostly dubbed from European languages, and on the formal level the modern educational systems of various Muslim countries, nearly all of which consist of poor imitations of various Western models at a time when the Western educational system itself is undergoing a crisis of unparalleled dimensions.[7] The difference between the relation of parent to child or teacher to student in the two systems, as well as the content of the subject matter taught, is as great as can be imagined. In the more modernized circles of the Islamic world, even small children face this tension, as on the one hand they still learn the various traditional stories which contain the profoundest wisdom in simple language from the mouth of a grandparent or a nanny and, on the other hand, they watch murder stories and the like on television screens. Among the adults, the opposition and the tension are even more evident, with two contending educational systems providing a natural battlefield upon which the contemporary Muslim, both as an individual who wishes to receive education and as a parent wanting to select a school for his or her child, stands bewildered.[8] The transition from the traditional educational system to the modern ones has in most cases been abrupt and disrup-

tive and is one of the major causes of the confusing state which the contemporary Muslim now faces.[9]

It might be thought that the dilemma of the contemporary Muslim under the influence and pressure of modernism is limited to the intellectual and educational realm, but this is far from true. Actually, a crisis of the same intensity, and perhaps of an even more direct effect, exists in the world of forms with which art is concerned. In this domain, the remarkably homogeneous yet diversified world of Islamic art, which succeeded in creating an Islamic ambience for the Muslim within which he has lived and died, is threatened from every direction. Traditional Islamic architecture has been at a peak during nearly all of its long history and can be cited as a supreme example of that architecture which Goethe referred to as "music grown silent."[10] Today, in many Islamic cities, architecture is no longer music grown silent but sheer noise and cacophony petrified. An art which was a direct call from the Center and which reflected the Center and the Transcendent in nearly every one of its forms[11] is now threatened by an "art" of the most debased and opaque nature whose source of inspiration is revealed by the veil of ugliness with which it shrouds the environment.

The same conflict is to be seen in the auditory arts. Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish and North Indian music, all of which are among the highest expressions of Islamic art, have to compete with music of a much lower order of inspiration, to put it mildly, not only on a particular programme but sometimes even within the same composition. Classical poetry likewise has to contend with an army of young poets often cut off from their own traditional roots but bent on imitating at all costs not only the content but even the form of modern European and American poetry. Even the chanting of the Noble Quran, that supreme form of Islamic sacred art, is sometimes mutilated beyond recognition in many city centers where indiscriminate use is made of loudspeakers as if people wished to compete with the traffic noise through sheer volume.[12] Altogether, in the realm of forms as in the realm of ideas, there remains an acute tension and confrontation between two contending worlds with-

in which the contemporary Muslim has to live and to make daily decisions.

As far as political, social and economic life are concerned, the conflicts and tensions are so many and at the same time so evident that there is no need to delve into them here. Numerous studies have already been devoted to them in the East and the West. The general trend in these domains as elsewhere is towards the secularization of the economic and political life of the Muslim peoples in total contrast to the Islamic conception, which has sacralized man's daily life including, of course, his political and economic activities and institutions. Of course there have also occurred political movements in the other direction seeking to re-establish an Islamic order but even in these cases modernist elements and ideologies have usually become combined with Islamic ones.

As an example of the contrasts created within these fields and the dilemmas brought into being for the present-day Muslim who is aware of the world about him may be mentioned the concept of freedom.[13] In the traditional Islamic view, absolute freedom belongs to God alone and man can gain freedom only to the extent that he becomes spiritually perfected. All the restrictions imposed upon his life by the *Sharīᶜah* or upon his art by the traditional canons are seen not as restrictions upon his freedom but as the indispensable aids which alone make the attainment of real freedom possible. The concept of *ḥurriyyah* (the word into which "freedom" is usually translated today in modern Arabic) is taken from the post-Renaissance idea of individual freedom, which means ultimately imprisonment within the narrow confines of one's own individual nature. This totally Western idea is so alien to traditional Islam that this word cannot be found in any traditional text with the same meaning it has now gained in modern Arabic. In the Islamic world-view, freedom to do evil or to become severed from the source of all existence is only an illusory freedom. The only real freedom is that which enables man to attain that perfection which allows him to approach and ultimately reach the One, Who is at once absolute necessity and absolute freedom. How

far removed is this concept from the current Western notion of freedom, and what confusions are created within the mind of a man who is attracted by the pull of both ideas! These confusions affect nearly all of his daily decisions and his relations with nearly all the institutions of society from the family to the state. And these confusions reflect upon art as well as morality, influencing individual patterns of behavior in matters as far apart as sex and literary style.

These are only some of the dilemmas the contemporary Muslim in contact with the modern world faces. Many more could be added in nearly every domain of life. Together these contending factors have succeeded in converting the life and thought of most modernized Muslims into a patchwork of conflicting thoughts and actions whose contradictory nature remains often hidden from themselves. It might, of course, be asked why this dilemma must exist at all. Why cannot Muslims simply evaluate modern civilization according to the principles of their own tradition and simply reject what is opposed to these principles? The answer lies in the state of mind of most modernized Muslims, who, having been witness to the superior power of the modern West in the economic and military fields, fall under the spell of everything else that comes from the West, from philosophy to ethics, from social theories to canons of beauty. Moreover, many of them display a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the West which is truly amazing. They take much too seriously the various currents that issue forth from the West and usually last but a short time, and they make every effort possible either to conform to them or to distort the teachings of Islam to appear in harmony with these currents. The source of the tension that exists within the soul of the modernized Muslim is precisely the strong pull of the modern world upon a segment of the Islamic *ummah* (Islamic community) whose hold upon its tradition and whose roots within the tradition have been weakened during, and as a result of, that very historical process which has enabled modernism to spread throughout the Islamic world.

It must, however, be added that there is also a vast segment

of the Islamic world which, although touched by the storm of modernism, has its roots firmly grounded in the Islamic tradition and, in fact, sees in the events that pass over the surface of the earth today a confirmation rather than a denial of Islam, for these very events concerning the latter days were predicted long ago in traditional Islamic sources. The Blessed Prophet (upon whom be peace) spoke more than once of conditions arising at the end of time about which men would question whether the Prophet had mentioned anything concerning them, that is, events which would break the mould of traditional Islamic life completely. He spoke of mountains being moved from their station, alluding to the devastation brought upon the natural environment. He spoke through his God-given knowledge of these and many other events to which the modern and what is now called the post-modern world is now becoming witness.

These confirmations cannot but strengthen the faith of those contemporary Muslims who are firmly rooted in their own tradition, while those whose faith has become shaken as a result of the corroding influence of modernism are suspended within a field of tension, between the rim and the axis, between secularism and modernism on the one hand and the sacred and the traditional on the other. Such people are therefore also in profound need of a message from the Center, a message that would be authentic and at the same time reinterpreted in a fresh manner to save them from their particular condition of animated suspension and intellectual paralysis. Although their condition differs from that of Western man both psychologically and mentally, their need for a return to the Center is as urgent, for they, like Western man who in an earlier period of his history became cut off from his spiritual traditions, are faced with the uncertainties of life and death, with a vacuum which cannot be filled save by the sacred. However, in contrast to modern Westerners, contemporary Muslims belong to a tradition which is still fully alive in all its dimensions and needs only to be relived and to have its immutable principles applied again to existing conditions for them to be saved from the whirlpool of doubt and uncertainty into which they have cast themselves

almost with the innocence of children imitating a "sophisticated" adult, but without being truly innocent. For as the Quran has asserted so often, man is responsible for his actions before God, and the modernized Muslim is certainly no exception to this divinely ordained principle.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. This last group is small indeed, but nevertheless it is beginning to make its presence felt in some modernized cities of the Islamic world. There are also a few Muslims who are trying to re-discover tradition and have a deep nostalgia for it but who are lost in the maze of pseudo-traditional movements that have swept over the West recently. There is, of course, also an intellectual elite which, having absorbed Western culture to its very roots, has rediscovered and returned to the Islamic tradition, but its number at the moment is small although growing.

2. In certain schools of Islamic esoterism, the *Sharīᶜah* itself has been compared to the rim or the circumference, the *Ṭarīqah* to the spokes and the *Ḥaqīqah* to the center of the wheel. See S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chicago (IL), Kazi Publications, 2000, p. 122. But here we have used the symbolism of the rim and the axis in the sense given to it in the first chapter rather than in the sense used by these schools.

3. Concerning Islamic cosmology, see S. H. Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Albany (NY), the State University of New York Press, 1993.

4. This well-known *ḥadīth* of the Blessed Prophet, which means "God created man according to His form," must not, however, be understood in an anthropomorphic sense. See F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, Chap. 1; and S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p. 18.

5. The Noble Quran says, "Say: In whose hand is the dominion (*malakūt*: meaning also essence or spiritual root) over all things? (33:88; Pickthall translation).

6. In fact if man cannot remain *khalīfat Allāh*, then he is dragged ultimately to the state of becoming *khalīfat al-shayṭān*, the vicegerent of Satan. A humanism cut off from God cannot but lead to the infra-human. One would think that the experiment carried out by Western man since the Renaissance should be sufficient "experimental" proof of this metaphysical assertion. But for certain types of mentalities hypnotized by the glitter of the modern world even such "experimental" evidence does not seem to be sufficient, although usually such people are the loudest defenders of the "scientific" and the "experimental" approach without usually understanding what it really means. We have dealt more extensively with this and other basic principles of Islam and their parodies in the modern world in our other writings.

7. See I. Illich, Deschooling Society, New York, Harper & Row, 1971. It is curious that despite this crisis in many Muslim countries, not only do the national educational systems seek to imitate ever more closely Western models, but also the foreign schools which were once run by missionaries continue to expand under the veil of "neutrality," which means in reality substituting for Christian missionary activity missionary zeal in the name of the spread of Western culture or, ultimately, secularism. If there are some exceptions to be observed, they are only exceptions which prove the rule.

8. It was in response to the crisis in Islamic education that the first world congress on Islamic education was held in Makkah in 1977. Many studies on this subject were to follow especially by S. A. Ashraf who founded the Islamic Academy in Cambridge, England and started a series of publications devoted to Islamic education along with the journal Muslim Education Quarterly. A leader in this field, he wrote numerous articles and books on the subject of Islamic education and the present day educational crisis in the Islamic world. See for example S. Sajjad Husain and S. A. Ashraf, Crisis in Muslim Education, Cambridge, The Islamic Academy, 1979; and the Islamic Education Series by the King Abdulaziz University under his general editorship.

9. For the transition from traditional education to modern as far as the Arab world is concerned, see A. L. Tibawi, Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems, London, Luzac, 1972.

10. "A noble philosopher has spoken of architecture as frozen music and has thereby caused much raising of eyebrows. We know of no better way to reintroduce this beautiful thought than by calling architecture 'music grown silent'." Maximen und Reflexionen, 1207, cited in S. Levarie and E. Levy, "The Pythagorean Table," Main Currents in Modern Thought, New York, Vol. 30, no. 4, March-April 1974, p. 124.

11. For the metaphysical foundations of Islamic art, see T. Burckhardt, Mirror of the Intellect, trans. W. Stoddart, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1987, Chap 21-24, pp. 210-247; idem., Art of Islam: Language and Meaning, London, Festival of the World of Islam, 1976; S. H. Nasr, Islamic Art and Spirituality, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1987; also N. Ardalan and L. Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture, Chicago (IL), ABC International Group, 2000.

12. The indiscriminate use of loudspeakers, which accompany

some people in the Islamic world from the cradle to the grave, is a sign of the loss of discernment and artistic taste among many contemporary Muslims affected by the influence of modernism.

13. See. F. Rosenthal, The Muslim Concept of Freedom Prior to the Nineteenth Century, Leiden, 1960, where the meaning of this concept during the various periods of Islamic history is analyzed. On the Islamic concept of freedom see also our "The Concept and Reality of Freedom in Islam and Islamic Civilization," in S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1981, pp. 16-23.

Part II

The Comparative Method and the Study of the Islamic Intellectual Heritage in the West

Chapter 3
Metaphysics and Philosophy East and West: Necessary Conditions for Meaningful Comparative Study

There is an Arabic proverb according to which a fish always begins to decay from its head. This saying echoes the well-known Latin proverb corruptio optimi pessima: "the corruption of the best is the worst." What occurred in the West during the Renaissance and is now happening in so many parts of the Islamic world is precisely the corruption of the best, the decay of the head of the fish whose body is still intact. To oppose this process and to cater to the real needs of man in both East and West, therefore, it is likewise necessary to begin from the "head," from the teachings related to the most sublime aspect of tradition contained in its spiritual and intellectual dimensions which are the first to become inaccessible and "veiled," rather than the social and practical dimensions of the tradition which usually remain more accessible. It is the decay of the best or most intellectually gifted and hence influential in the long run that must be combated with the help of sapiential doctrines, the message from the Center the forgetting of which is at the root of the pathetic plight of modern man now observable on such a vast scale. It is, therefore, to the metaphysical dimension of tradition contained at the heart of religion that we must turn before all else.

A great deal has been written during the past decades on

the methodology of comparative religion, on various approaches taken by Western scholars, ranging from historians to phenomenologists, in studying Eastern religions. With this already extensively debated subject we will not concern ourselves here.[1] Rather, we shall limit ourselves to the question of Oriental and particularly Islamic metaphysics and traditional philosophy, of which the understanding in the West is sought by so many but is attained by so few, remembering that, in this domain, what holds true for the Islamic tradition applies to other Oriental traditions as well.

In contrast to the extravagant claims made for worldwide communication between peoples of various cultures and races, the Tower of Babel in which modern and even more post-modern man with all his new means of electronic communication reside makes communication of serious matters most difficult at a time when outward contact between men seems to have become easier than at any other period of human history. The common language of wisdom having been lost, there exists for modernized men no common ground to make any meaningful communication possible, especially between the modern world and the traditions of the East. Men talk of a single humanity and globalization at a time when there has never been so little inner communication between diverse components of the human species. Today, outwardly cut off from the umbilical cord that has always connected them to the common Divine Ground, men are reduced to islands set apart by an insuperable chasm which no amount of humanism or talk of a single global order can bridge. In no field is this as true as in metaphysical doctrines and traditional "philosophy," or in that corpus of knowledge which determines the ultimate framework of all man's other modes of knowledge as well as the values of his actions.

Because of the lack of discernment which characterizes the modern world and which is to be seen often even more among Westernized Orientals, Muslim and otherwise, than among Westerners themselves, all kinds of fantastic excesses on both sides have prevented for the most part a meaningful intellectual communication and a comparative study of philosophy and

metaphysics worthy of the name. The greatest gnostics and saints have often been compared with sceptics, and different levels of inspiration have been totally confused. A Tolstoy has been called a Mahatma; Hume's denial of causality has been related to Ashᶜarite theology on the one hand and to Buddhism on the other; Sankara has been compared with the German idealists, and Nietzsche with Rūmī. Western students of Oriental doctrines have usually tried to reduce these doctrines to "profane" philosophy, and modernized Orientals, often burdened by the half-hidden sense of inferiority to which allusion has already been made, have tried to give respectability to the same doctrines and to "elevate" them by giving them the honor of being in harmony with the thought of this or that Western philosopher, who in fact is usually out of vogue in the West itself by the time such comparisons are made. On both sides, usually, the relation of the "philosophy" in question to the experience or direct knowledge of the Truth which is the source of this "philosophy" is forgotten, and levels of reality are confused.

A first step toward a solution of this problem is to clear the ground of existing confusions in order to clarify exactly what is being compared with what. One must first of all ask what we mean by "philosophy." To this extremely complicated question one can provide a clear answer provided that the light of metaphysical certainty is present. But precisely because this light is lacking in most discussions, the worst kind of confusion reigns over the very attempt at a definition of the subject matter at hand. Moreover, the traditions of the East and the West have given different meanings to this term, although at the highest level of the philosophia perennis, the *sanātana* dharma of Hinduism or the *al-ḥikmat al-khālidah* of Islam, there has always been the profoundest agreement concerning the nature of the sophia which all true philosophers "love" and seek and in whose bosom alone can the East and West meet.[2]

To begin with, it can be said that, if we accept the meaning of the term "philosophy" current in the West in most European languages, then it is nearly synonymous with logic[3]—leaving aside the recent anti-rationalist movements based upon such

sentiments as anxiety and fear. In the West, philosophy as usually understood has sometimes allied itself with revelation and theology or true intellectual intuition ("intellect" being understood in its original sense) as in Johannes Scotus Erigena or St. Bonaventure;[4] at other times it has become wedded to mathematics or to the physical sciences, as in certain schools of the seventeenth century and again of the twentieth century; and at yet other times it has sought to analyze and dissect the data of the senses alone, as in British empiricism, and to serve solely the function of praxis.

Also in the West, at least in its main stream intellectual currents, metaphysics in its real sense, which is a sapiential knowledge based upon the direct and immediate intellection and vision of the Truth, has become reduced—thanks to the Occidental interpretation of Aristotle—to a branch of philosophy. As a result, men such as Plotinus, Proclus, Dionysius, Erigena and Nicolas of Cusa have been treated as ordinary philosophers, whereas if we accept the meaning of philosophy given above, they cannot by any means be classified in the same category as a Descartes or a Kant, nor even with the Aristotelian and Thomist philosophers, who occupy an intermediary position between these two groups, namely the post-mediaeval European philosophers on the one hand and the gnostics and metaphysicians on the other. As a result of the forgetting of the fundamental distinction between the intellect, which knows through immediate knowledge or vision, and reason, ratio, which can only know indirectly through analysis and division, the fundamental distinction between metaphysics as a scientia sacra or Divine Knowledge and philosophy considered not in its traditional sense but as a purely human form of mental activity has been blurred or forgotten.[5] Things have reached such a point that in the modern world all the different philosophical schools ranging from the purely metaphysical to the feeblest efforts of atrophied minds have been put into a single category and their content has been reduced to a lowest common denominator.

To make the problem more difficult, despite the currently

accepted definition of philosophy in the West, the echo of philosophy as the doctrinal aspect of an integral spiritual way, or as metaphysics and theosophy in its original sense, still lingers on in the meaning of the word and continues to possess a marginal existence. One can in fact distinguish, at least in popular language in the West, two meanings of the term philosophy:[6] one in the technical sense alluded to above and the other in the sense of "wisdom." Against this latter meaning, in fact, most professional modern European and American philosophy has rebelled more than ever before, so that these modes of thought could hardly be called philosophia, for they do not love but hate wisdom. Logically they should be called miso-sophia.

As far as the Oriental traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Islam are concerned, the situation is just the reverse. Except for certain schools such as the *mashshā'ī* or Peripatetic school of Islam, which corresponds in many ways but not completely to Aristotelianism and Thomism in the West,[7] certain individual Islamic figures such as Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī, and some of the peripheral schools in India, there is nothing in the Oriental traditions which could be considered "philosophy" in the current Western sense of the term, precisely because the major intellectual traditions of the Orient are always wedded to a direct experience of the spiritual world and intellectual intuition in the strictest sense of the term. What is usually called Oriental philosophy is the doctrinal part of a total spiritual way, tied to a method of realization and inseparable from the revelation or tradition which has given birth to the way in question. That is why to speak of rationalistic philosophy and of Chinese or Hindu philosophy in the same breath is a contradiction in terms, unless we use the word "philosophy" in two different senses: of thought processes being wedded to intellection and spiritual experience, and of thought being completely cut off from intellection and this experience. It is a lack of awareness of this basic distinction that has made a sham of so many studies of comparative philosophy and has helped to blind to the real significance of Oriental metaphysics those in the West whose sources of knowl-

edge are the usual academic works on the subject. Far from being the object of mental play, this metaphysics has the function of enabling man to transcend the mental plane itself.

After one has taken into consideration the above differences as well as the essential role of religion and methods of spiritual realization in the creation and the sustaining of what is usually called "Oriental philosophy"—in contrast to what is found in modern Western philosophy—the first necessary condition for a meaningful comparative study will be complete awareness of the structure and the levels of meaning of the religious and metaphysical traditions of East and West. One can compare religions themselves; that belongs to the field of comparative religion. One can also compare the mystical and esoteric teachings of the Orient and the Occident in the field which has recently come to be called "comparative mysticism"[8] and which is in reality an aspect of comparative religion. These are disciplines apart from what is now becoming known as comparative philosophy, a discipline which seeks to study the intellectual heritage of various Oriental traditions and that of the Occident through the comparative method.

Now comparative philosophy per se is either a shallow comparison of apparently similar but essentially different teachings, or, if it is to be serious, it is a comparative study of different ways of thinking and various matrices determining different sciences and forms of knowledge in reference to the total vision of the Universe and of the nature of things, a vision which is inseparable from the religious and spiritual background that has produced the "philosophy" in question. The outward comparison of an Emerson and a Ḥāfiẓ or a Saᶜdī will never have any meaning unless what each has said is considered in the light of New England Protestantism and Islam respectively. Comparative philosophy without reference to the traditional and religious background, whether the religion in question has had a positive influence or has even been treated negatively, is as absurd as comparing single notes of music without reference to the melody of which they are a part.

Nor is comparative philosophy between East and West pos-

sible without considering the hierarchic nature of man's faculties and the modes of knowledge accessible to him. One of the most unfortunate and in fact tragic elements that has prevented most modern Western men from understanding Oriental teachings and in fact much of their own tradition is that they wish to study traditional man on the basis of the model of two-dimensional modern man deprived of the transcendent dimension, the type of man with whom they are usually closely associated. The very concept of man's identity and the meaning of the human state prevalent in the modern world is the greatest obstacle to an understanding of traditional man, who has been and continues to be aware of the Center and also of the multiple levels of existence and the grades of knowledge accessible to him.[9] If a blind man were to develop a philosophy based upon his experience of the world derived from his four other senses, surely it would differ from one based upon those four senses as well as upon sight. How much more would a "philosophy" based upon man's rational analysis of sense data differ from one that is the result of the experience of a world which transcends both reason and the sensible world? The functioning of the eye of the heart (*ʿayn al-qalb* or *chishm-i dil* of the Sufis, which corresponds to the "third eye" of the Hindus) makes accessible a vision or an experience of reality which affects man's "philosophy" about the nature of reality as completely as perception by the eye colors our view of the nature of material existence.

Without a full awareness of the hierarchy of knowledge—which can be reduced to at least the four basic levels of the intellectual, the imaginative (in its positive sense of imaginatio or *khayāl* in Arabic),[10] the rational and the sensible—again no meaningful comparative study is possible. When people say that Sankara said so and so, which was confirmed by Berkeley or some other eighteenth century philosopher, it must be asked whether the same means of gaining knowledge was accessible to both. Or when it is said that this or that existential philosopher has had an "experience of being" similar to that of a Mullā Ṣadrā or some other Muslim sage,[11] it must first be asked whether it is possible for a philosopher who negates Being to

have an experience of It, for in reality we can have an experience of Being only through the grace provided by Being Itself and by means of the paths provided by It through those objective manifestations of the Universal Intellect called religion or revelation. Whenever comparisons are to be made, it must be asked what the source of the "philosophy" in question is, whether it comes from ratiocination, from empirical analysis or from intellection and spiritual vision, or in other words upon which aspect of the being of the knower it depends. One must always remember the dictum of Aristotle that knowledge depends upon the mode of the knower.

In certain limited fields such as logic or the "philosophy of nature," comparisons can be made for the most part legitimately without recourse to the total background alluded to above, although even here elements cannot be divorced totally from their background. But to a certain degree it is possible to compare Indian or Islamic logic with the various logical schools in the West, or atomism as it developed in India or among the Muslim Ash^{c}arites with atomism in the West, at least before the modern period. But once this limit is passed, the total background and the question of the "source" of the knowledge in question become factors of paramount importance which one can neglect only at the expense of forsaking the possibility of true comprehension.

For example, it is possible to make serious comparative studies between Indian or Persian and Greek doctrines, or between Islamic philosophy and Western scholastic philosophy before the modern period. These studies can be meaningful because of both morphological resemblances and historical relations. But once we come to the modern period, the situation changes completely.[12] From the point of view of Oriental metaphysics, the whole movement of thought in the West from the period after Nicolas of Cusa to Hegel, not to speak of twentieth century philosophy, is a movement toward "anti-metaphysics" and an ever greater alienation from all that constitutes the very basis of all true "philosophy," namely the twin sources of truth, which for traditional or perennial philosophy are none other

than revelation and intellectual intuition or spiritual vision. Comparative studies made of this period should be concerned either with showing dissimilarities, conflicts and contradictions, or with the schools that have stood at the margin away from the mainstream of the history of European thought. A comparative study showing similarities between Oriental doctrines and modern Western "thought" could have meaning only in the case of such Western figures as those known by the collective name of the Cambridge Platonists, or Jacob Boehme, Claude St. Martin, Franz van Baader and the like, who are not even generally well known in the West, to say nothing of the East. Otherwise, to say that this or that statement of Hegel resembles the Upanishads or that Hume presents ideas similar to Nāgārjuna is to fall into the worst form of error, one which prevents any type of profound understanding from being achieved, either for Westerners wanting to understand the East or vice-versa.

In this order of indiscriminate comparisons without regard for the real nature of the ideas involved and for their meaning within the total context of things, Orientals have been even more at fault than the Western scholars who concern themselves with Oriental studies. In many instances found over and over again in the writings of modernized Orientals, the nature of the experience upon which the "philosophy" in question is based and the total worldview in which alone it possesses meaning are completely overlooked. And often the sentimental desire to bring about harmony between completely contradictory and incompatible premises—such as those upon which the traditional societies and the anti-traditional modern civilization are based—causes such writers to speak of apparent resemblances where there are in fact only the deepest contrasts and contradictions. This attitude reduces the role of comparative philosophy to that of a sentimental charity, whereas its function should be to serve the truth and to reveal contrasts and differences wherever they exist.

In speaking of differences we must also turn our glance for a moment to the question of the comparative study of doctrines,

not between East and West but between the Eastern traditions themselves. One of the results of Western colonization of Asia during the last two centuries has been that even today the different civilizations of Asia see each other, even if they be neighbors, in the mirror of the Occident. "Comparative philosophy" is taken for granted to mean the comparison of ideas between East and West. Moreover, Oriental authors who undertake comparative studies usually take their own tradition and that of the West into consideration and nothing else. A Muslim considers only Islam and the West, and a Hindu Hinduism and Western thought, whereas the situation should be otherwise. For example, as far as relations between Hinduism and Islam are concerned, contemporary Hindu and Muslim scholars should strive to their utmost to attain today, through comparison, a degree of understanding of their respective traditions similar to what was achieved by Dārā Shukūh and Mīr Abu'l-Qāsim Findiriskī three centuries ago. Only recently, in fact, have a handful of Oriental scholars begun to take seriously comparative studies within the Oriental traditions themselves, and a few outstanding works have been composed in this domain,[13] but a great deal more needs to be done in this fertile but almost unexplored field.

In the domain of comparing various Oriental doctrines, one finds, of course, a much firmer ground for comparison than when dealing with the modern West, seeing that Oriental civilizations are all of a traditional character, rooted in the Divine Principle which presides over and dominates them. But even here it is necessary to proceed with a spirit of discernment, avoiding shallow and sentimental comparisons and equations, and situating each school and doctrine in its appropriate place within the total matrix of its tradition. Although in a profound sense there is an East or Orient which stands vis-a-vis the Occident, a more detailed panorama of the intellectual landscape, which would give the appropriate depth to comparative studies, would reveal several Orients juxtaposed against a modern Occident whose historical tradition has, however, possessed elements and periods akin to the Orient, a term which, more

than a geographical location, symbolizes most of all a spiritual reality, the world of light and illumination.[14]

It might be asked, "What use is the comparative study of philosophy and metaphysics?" To the West, its primary function can be to provide the criteria necessary to criticize in depth Western philosophy itself, which although outwardly critical of earlier schools of philosophy rarely turns the sharp edge of criticism against its own foundations and epistemology and is hardly ever exposed to criticism of it taken as a whole and of its basic premises. Moreover, Oriental doctrines can fulfill that most fundamental and urgent task of reminding the West of truths that have existed within its own tradition but which have become so completely forgotten that it appears to many as if they had never existed. Today, it is in fact nearly impossible for Western man to rediscover the whole of his own tradition without the aid of Oriental metaphysics.[15] This is particularly so because the sapiential doctrines and the appropriate spiritual techniques necessary for their realization are difficult to access in the West, and "philosophy" as ordinarily taught has become totally divorced from experience of a spiritual nature. In the traditional East the very opposite holds true. "Philosophy" as a mental play or discipline which does not transform one's being is considered meaningless and in fact dangerous. The whole of the teachings of such Islamic philosophers ās Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā and all of Sufism are based on this point, as are all the schools of Hinduism and Buddhism, especially Vedanta and Zen not to speak of Neo-Confucianism. The very separation of knowledge from being which lies at the heart of the crisis of modern man is avoided in the Oriental traditions, which consider legitimate only that form of knowledge that can transform the being of the knower. The West could learn no greater lesson from the East than the realization of the central role of spiritual discipline in the attainment of any knowledge of permanent value.

As far as modern Easterners are concerned, one observes among most of those who are at once interested in the intellectual life and affected by the modernist spirit the most abom-

inable lack of discernment and the dangerous tendency to mix the sacred and the profane, thus creating an eclectic conglomeration of sacred doctrines and profane and transient "thoughts" which becomes a most deadly instrument for the destruction of all that still survives of true intellectuality and spirituality in the East. The errors committed by Easterners in this domain are perhaps even graver than those of Western scholars, because, here as in instances already cited, there is more possibility of spiritual damage in the East, where traditions have been better preserved. Some of the most destructive of those forces that have played havoc in Eastern societies during the past century are the result of shallow and facile "syntheses" of Eastern and Western thought and superficial attempts at their unification. A more serious comparative study would therefore also serve Eastern scholars by enabling them to know better the very complex and complicated thought patterns of the modern world and the real nature of the modern world itself, so that they might be able to defend more carefully the authenticity of their own traditions while seeking at the same time to express their timeless truths in a contemporary manner without betraying their essence. In this supreme task that today stands before every genuine Oriental intellectual in general and Muslim intellectual in particular, the fruits of comparative study carried out on a serious basis can be of much value.

Finally, a comparative study in depth of Eastern doctrines and Western schools can help to achieve an understanding between East and West based not on the shifting sands of human nature nor on some form of humanism but on immutable truths whose attainment is made possible by the spiritual experience that is accessible to qualified men, whether of East or West. It is intellectual intuition, and the spiritual experience of which a metaphysical doctrine is in a sense the fruit, that alone can make possible the attainment of that harmony and unity which in its transcendence comprehends both the East and the West, the harmony and unity without which authentic civilizational dialogue, so widely discussed today, is not achievable. Today, many men who have been exposed to the

modern world in a sense carry both the Orient and the Occident as two poles and tendencies within themselves. A comparative study in depth can make possible, through the removal of that complex of current errors which constitutes the modern world, the vision of that "tree that is neither of the East nor of the West,"[16] wherein alone can the East and the West be united. To seek this noble end, which would mean also the discovery of the immutable nature of man and which is the only way possible to correct the optical illusions to which the modern world is victim, must be the purpose of all serious studies of Eastern and Western doctrines and philosophies. It is a goal to the achievement of which the truly contemplative and intellectual elite of both East and West are urgently summoned by the very situation of man in the contemporary world, a situation which demands such a study, whatever be the differences in the problems faced by men living in the Orient and in the Occident.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Numerous contemporary historians of religion such as M. Eliade, H. Smith, W. C. Smith, C. Adams, R. H. L. Slater and J. Waandenburg have dealt with this subject, which now occupies much attention among scholars of comparative religion. On the incomparable method of studying various religions employed by F. Schuon, who more than any other contemporary authority has provided Western man with the key to the understanding of Oriental religions, see H. Smith, "The Relation between Religions," in Main Currents in Modern Thought, Vol. 30, no. 2, Nov-Dec, 1973, pp. 52-57 Rochester (NY). See also S. H. Nasr (ed.) The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon, Rockport (MA), Element Books, 1986, pp. 14-26, and pp. 149 ff.

2. "We recognize that the only possible ground upon which an effective entente of East and West can be accomplished is that of the purely intellectual wisdom that is one and the same at all times and for all men, and is independent of all environmental idiosyncrasy." A. K. Coomaraswamy, "On the Pertinence of Philosophy," What is Civilization? and Other Essays, Ipswich, Golgonooza Press, 1989, p. 19.

3. "Philosophy, in the sense in which we understand the term (which is also its current meaning) primarily consists of logic; this definition of Guénon's puts philosophic thought in its right place and clearly distinguishes it from "intellectual intuition," which is the direct apprehension of a truth." F. Schuon, Language of the Self, trans. by M. Pallis and M. Matheson, Madras, 1959, p. 7.

4. "Logic can either operate as part of an intellection, or else, on the contrary, put itself at the service of an error; moreover, unintelligence can diminish or even nullify logic, so that philosophy can in fact become the vehicle of almost anything; it can be an Aristotelianism carrying ontological insights, just as it can degenerate into an "existentialism" in which logic has become a mere shadow of itself, a blind and unreal operation, indeed, what can be said of a "metaphysic" which idiotically posits man at the center of the Real, like a sack of coal, and which operates with such blatantly subjective and conjectural concepts as 'worry' and 'anguish'?" ibid, p. 7.

5. "A metaphysical doctrine is the incarnation in the mind of a universal truth. A philosophical system is a rational attempt to resolve certain questions which we put to ourselves. A concept is a "problem" only in the context of a particular ignorance," F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, trans. P. Townsend, Bedfont,

Middlesex, Perennial Books, 1987, pp. 10-11. This distinction has also been thoroughly discussed by R. Guénon in his many works.

6. Coomaraswamy also distinguished between two kinds of philosophy whose unity is embraced by wisdom alone: "Philosophy, accordingly, is a wisdom about knowledge, a correction du savoir penser . . . Beyond this, however, philosophy has been held to mean a wisdom not so much about particular kinds of thought, as a wisdom about thinking, and an analysis of what it means to think, and an enquiry as to what may be the nature of the ultimate reference of thought." op. cit., p. 14.

7. See S. H. Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, Delmar (NY), Caravan Books, 1986, Chap. I. There are those in the West who give another interpretation to St. Thomas and believe that he defended metaphysical intuition rather than a sensationalist empiricism. See E. I. Watkin, A Philosophy of Form, London, Sheed and Ward, 1950.

8. This field has attracted the attention of several well-known scholars during the past few decades, men such as R. Otto, L. Gardet, D. T. Suzuki and A. Graham. It has received its profoundest treatment, however, in the writings of F. Schuon, who has followed the path, trodden before him by R. Guénon and A. K. Coomaraswamy, to its sublimest peak.

9. See S. H. Nasr, "Who is Man? The Perennial Answer of Islam," Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 2, 1968, pp. 45-56; also in J. Needleman (ed.), The Sword of Gnosis, pp. 203-217.

10. See H. Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, trans. N. Pearson, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1977. It is of interest to note that this same hierarchy existed in Boethius and through him influenced the European Middle Ages.

11 See H. Corbin (ed.), Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques (*Kitāb al-mashāᶜir* of Mullā Ṣadrā), Tehran-Paris, 1964 and Paris, Verdier, 1988; A. Maisonneuve, Introduction.

12. In the case of certain seventeenth century philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza it is also, of course, possible and legitimate to trace the influence of Islamic and Greek as well as Scholastic philosophy upon them,, as has been done so ably by such scholars as E. Gilson and H. A. Wolfson.

13. We have in mind especially the two volume work of T. Izutsu,, Sufism and Taoism—A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, London and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983, which contains a profound study of these men and a comparison

of their doctrines. See also the unique opus dealing for the first time with an indepth comparison of Islamic and Neo-Confucian thought, S. Murata, Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light (introduction by Tu Wei-ming), Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 2000. This ground breaking work deals with the Chinese Muslim philosophers Wang Tai-Yü and Liu Chi and the latter's rendition of Jāmī's *Lawā'iḥ*, in the language of Neo-Confucian philosophy.

14. This symbolism is the basis of Suhrawardī's "Theosophy of the Orient of Light" (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), which is at once Oriental and illuminative. See Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, pp. 64 ff. .

15. Concerning the teachings of Guénon on this subject, Coomaraswamy writes, "It is only because this metaphysics still survives as a living power in Eastern societies, in so far as they have not been corrupted by the withering touch of Western,, or rather modern civilization . . ., and not to Orientalize the West, but to bring back the West to a consciousness of the roots of her own life and . . . values . . ., that Guénon asks us to turn to the East." "Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge," The Bugbear of Literacy, Bedfont, Perennial Books, 1979, p. 73.

16. This is in reference to the verse from "The Light" (*āyat al-nūr*) in the Quran (24:35).

Chapter 4
The Significance of the Comparative Method for the Study of the Islamic Intellectual and Spiritual Heritage

Having dealt with the problems and the significance of "the comparative method," we must now apply this method to the Islamic universe, with which we are particularly concerned. It can be said with certainty that the comparative method, in the sense given to it in the previous chapter, is the most suitable means to explain and elucidate the Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage for Western man. And although obviously not necessary for Muslims who wish to study their own tradition, even in their case it can be helpful to those who have received some form of modern education and whose matrix of thought and attitudes are often determined to some degree by elements drawn from the context of Western history and culture.

In applying the comparative method to the Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage, we must emphasize once again that the term "philosophy" (*al-falsafah* or *al-ḥikmah*) used in a traditional Islamic context must not be confused or equated with the modern use of the term,[1] and also that the basic distinction between Oriental metaphysics and profane philosophy must be kept in mind. Moreover, the traditional Islamic "philosophy" which is usually the subject of comparative studies fills, in fact, an intermediate position in the spectrum of Islamic intellectual

life between the pure metaphysics contained in various forms of Islamic esoterism, especially Sufism but also the inner aspect of Shi^{c}ism, and rationalistic philosophy, which through its gradual decadence in the West led to the completely profane philosophy of today. For it must be remembered that the post-mediaeval development of Western philosophy—following the Scholastic school, which is closely related to the Islamic philosophy in question—is based on the gradual decomposition of the concept of Being, which was so central to mediaeval European philosophy, and the gradual estrangement of reason, the tool par excellence of modern European philosophy, from the light of the Intellect.[3]

With these distinctions in view, we can proceed to apply the comparative method to Islamic intellectuality and spirituality, both the "philosophy" mentioned above, which is usually the subject of comparative studies and also pure metaphysics, and gnosis (*ma^{c}rifah*) in both its theoretical and its practical aspects, keeping in mind the hierarchy of knowledge that forms the basis of traditional Islamic intellectual life. In this domain, we must also be aware of the full breadth of the rich Islamic intellectual heritage which includes the several forms of gnostic doctrines contained in Sufism and various forms of Shi^{c}ism, the school of illumination (*ishrāq*) of Suhrawardī, the "transcendent theosophy" (*al-ḥikmat al-muta^{c}āliyah*) of Mullā Ṣadrā, Ismā^{c}īlī philosophy and theology, Peripatetic philosophy, later *Kalām*, the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), both Sunni and Shi^{c}ite, and many other schools, not all of which can be enumerated here. The teachings of all of these schools can be brought back to life by comparing them with metaphysical and philosophical schools of a corresponding order in other traditions and, as far as Western man is concerned, of course by comparing them with the major traditions that have dominated the West, namely the Graeco-Alexandrian and the Judeo-Christian. Moreover, the profound intellectual crisis of modern man can be brought into focus especially for Muslims through a comparison which would show the contrast between the sapiential teachings of these Islamic schools and what passes for philosophy or "thought" in the West today.[4] Finally, the operative and practi-

cal aspects of attaining gnosis or *maʿrifah* which are contained in the teachings of Sufism can be studied in the light of the current needs of contemporary man, to which we shall turn in the next chapter, as well as with respect to the present-day condition of Muslims themselves.

The application of the comparative method to the Islamic intellectual heritage can be particularly fecund for the study of metaphysics and philosophy in both the East and the West because of the special function and role of Islam in human history. Because of the integrating power of Islam and the fact that it was destined to cover the "middle-belt" of the world, it came historically into contact with many modes of thought, including the Graeco-Alexandrian, Persian, Indian and even, to some extent, Far Eastern. The basis of Islamic intellectual life was therefore cosmopolitan and international in conformity with the worldwide perspective of Islam itself and the universal nature of the fundamental Islamic doctrine of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*).[5] Moreover, because it was the last revelation and therefore the synthesis of the messages of the traditions before it, Islam developed an extremely rich intellectual life into which was integrated much of the heritage of mankind that had preceded it, a heritage that became transformed by the light of Unity and converted into a building block in the new edifice of the Islamic arts, sciences and philosophy. Islamic philosophy, if considered in its totality and not only in terms of the Peripatetic school known in the West, is extremely rich and possesses schools that can be compared with most of the intellectual perspectives and traditional philosophies of the East, of the ancient Mediterranean world and of mediaeval Europe.

As far as the Mediterranean and more specifically Greek thought is concerned, Islam possesses certain interpretations and understandings of some of the schools of Greek philosophy which would be of the utmost importance for the rediscovery of the veritable nature of the philosophy of a Pythagoras, an Empedocles or a Parminedes in the West.

Comparative studies would be also fruitful as an adjunct to historical methods of research and would be basic in bringing out the morphological structure of the different Islamic schools

by comparing and contrasting them with similar schools elsewhere. Sometimes even these two approaches, namely the historical and the comparative, can be combined, as for example a study of atomism in *Kalām* and a comparison of it with Buddhist schools of atomism, which could clarify the historical roots of the idea[6] and bring out the similarities and differences between the atomism of *Kalām* and that of the Buddhist schools. There are many pages and passages in the history of Islamic philosophy which could be clarified in this way.

Comparative philosophy can, moreover, play an important function for Muslims themselves, not only by making the Western intellectual tradition as well as its modern deviations better known to them, but also by drawing their attention to non-Western traditions and re-establishing the balance destroyed by the unilateral domination of Western civilization over the East during the past two centuries. As mentioned above, today for most people in the East, not only Muslims but also Hindus, Buddhists and others, comparative philosophy means comparing the "philosophy" of their own civilization with that of the West and, in fact, only the modern West. Outside the small circle of traditional writers whose works are in any case still not well known in much of the Islamic world, rarely does one find serious comparative studies made between Islamic metaphysics and philosophy and those of India and the Far East.[7] The cultivation of the comparative approach in the field of Islamic metaphysics and philosophy could make Muslims aware of the vast riches of the traditional doctrines of India and the Far East, and through them could put Western philosophy in a more appropriate perspective. Moreover, because of the nature of Oriental doctrines, the very awareness of these doctrines could help Muslim scholars discover other aspects of the Western intellectual tradition greatly neglected in the Islamic world until now precisely because of the paralyzing influence of modern European thought upon "educated" classes in the Islamic world. The sapiential nature of Oriental doctrines and the very depth of their metaphysical teachings could be instrumental in a direct fashion in making the awareness of the Western intellectual tradition among Muslims more profound.

It could thereby indirectly provide for Muslim scholars a key to the better understanding of the West and the sapiential teachings contained in the writings of such groups as the early Church Fathers, the apophatic theology of the Eastern Church, the School of Chartres, intellectual currents of mediaeval and Renaissance Christian mysticism—especially of the school of Eckhart and Angelus Silesius—and Western alchemy and Hermeticism.[8] In any case, to introduce comparative philosophy in the serious sense into the domain of Islamic philosophy would influence the very understanding of the relation of Islamic philosophy to Western thought and that of the nature of Western thought itself held by most educated Muslims today.

As far as the effect of the comparative approach upon a better understanding of Islamic philosophy itself is concerned, the extent of its possibilities is evident to anyone acquainted with the structure of Islamic thought. A few illustrations will bring out the role comparative philosophy can play in different areas. To start with the Graeco-Alexandrian tradition, we must recall that there are, of course, outstanding problems of an historical nature which deal on the one hand with the Greek roots of many facets of Islamic philosophy and on the other with the survival of important elements of the Graeco-Alexandrian heritage, particularly of the late period, in Arabic. This is a subject for historical research, and many scholars in both East and West have devoted themselves to both of its dimensions.

But, in addition, morphological comparisons could play an important role in bringing out the differences as well as the similarities between the Greek and the Islamic traditions and reveal how the elements of Greek thought that were accepted by the Muslims were transformed by them into elements of a new intellectual structure possessing a significance beyond what the purely historical method of tracing influences can reveal. A comparative study of Hermetic philosophy in Alexandria and alchemical philosophy in Islam, of Greek sapiential and gnostic teachings of the Middle and Neoplatonists—especially of Plotinus himself—and the masters of Islamic gnosis such as Ibn ᶜArabī, of the Greek Pythagorean teachings of such figures as Nichomachus and the Muslim Pythagoreans

such as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and many other instances would reveal the structural similarities and also the differences between doctrines of a similar or corresponding order in traditions possessing differing characteristics.

In the Graeco-Alexandrian case, comparative studies should complement the historical ones. The historical method would reveal the roots of many ideas adopted by Islamic philosophy from the Greek heritage, and the comparative method would cast light—because of the living nature of the Islamic tradition and its esoteric and gnostic teachings—upon certain features of the Graeco-Alexandrian tradition itself forgotten in the West. It could be especially helpful in enabling Western scholars to reevaluate their own judgment of Greek philosophy, in which they usually make no distinction between purely human philosophy and a wisdom of a suprahuman inspiration. The Muslim intellectuals, thanks to the grace (*barakah*) of the Islamic revelation and the particular light of the "Muḥammadan" message which enabled them to penetrate into the very heart of non-Islamic traditions when necessary, discerned almost automatically the basic distinction between the sapiential doctrines of such schools as the Pythagorean, Platonic, Aristotelian and Neoplatonic on the one hand and the Sophist, the Epicurean and the like on the other. This distinction between a teaching of an ultimately divine inspiration and a purely profane philosophy was so natural for them that they separated the two immediately and did not even consider the latter type of thought to be philosophy at all. It must be recalled that Suhrawardī asserted that Aristotle was the last of the Greek philosophers and not the first, as the post-Renaissance philosophy of the West has claimed in its interpretation of the Greek heritage. Islamic philosophers also had a remarkably accurate view of the real nature of the teachings of a figure such as Empedocles and Parminedes as recent research in the West has demonstrated.[10] The understanding of this basic distinction between a metaphysics of a purely traditional order couched in philosophical language and alone considered as philosophy, and a purely profane philosophy which the Muslims did not consider worthy of being called philosophy at all is

essential for any serious reinterpretation of the Graeco-Alexandrian heritage by contemporary Western man in search of the roots of his own metaphysical heritage. If the West were to understand today the true nature of Ibn ᶜArabī's doctrines, which belong to a still living spiritual and intellectual tradition, these doctrines in turn could serve as a key for an understanding of a Plotinus or a Proclus, metaphysicians and gnostics who belong to a tradition the living sources of which are no longer accessible, and who are moreover usually innocently classified with modern academic philosophers. As for Muslims, the comparative method could reveal much more to them of the true structure and nature of the Graeco-Alexandrian antiquity than could facile translations of standard Western histories of Greek philosophy, works which are usually colored by current and passing modes and fashions of thought and yet are beginning to influence the contemporary Muslim's view of the heritage of antiquity which he had viewed until now through the eyes of his own scholars, sages and metaphysicians.

A somewhat similar situation exists vis-a-vis the intellectual tradition of pre-Islamic Persia. Here also there are certain historical influences the understanding of which is important for a full grasp of the genesis of Islamic philosophy. But the comparative method can reveal another dimension which in this case is also a key for an understanding of the spiritual and intellectual destiny of the Persian people.[11] To compare the angelology of Suhrawardī with that of Zoroastrianism or the original story of Kay Khusraw with its treatment in the visionary narratives of Suhrawardī is more than anything to penetrate into the way in which the universe of the pre-Islamic Persians was transformed into the Islamic one. Many of the profounder reasons for the continuation of the life of Islamic philosophy in Persia after its cessation in the Western lands of Islam can also be understood through the comparative method. Moreover, many of the deepest characteristics of the tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia can be discovered with the help of a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and the Weltanschauung of the pre-Islamic Persians.[12]

The situation of the mediaeval West in relation to Islamic

philosophy is somewhat similar to that of Islamic philosophy vis-a-vis the Greek heritage. There are, naturally, extensive historical relations, and the work that has been carried out during the past few decades in making better known the Latin corpus of the writings of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, as well as of other Muslim authors, and in tracing their influence in the West is, of course, precious. Without it, one would not be able to understand the genesis of Scholasticism. But there are possibilities of studies of a profounder nature based upon the comparative method which could enable Westerners to better understand Islamic thought and vice versa. As already stated, a comparative and morphological study of such figures as Eckhart with Ibn ᶜArabī or Rūmī, Erigena or other Western Illuminationists with Suhrawardī, or St. Augustine with al-Ghazzālī, would give a greater insight into the structure of the Islamic and Christian traditions than an attempt merely to discover lines of influence.

As for the Asian world, it presents an arena of almost unlimited possibility for the application of the comparative method. As far as the Indian world is concerned, besides such historical influences as that of Buddhist and Hindu moral philosophy and possibly of atomism upon early Islam, and Sufism upon certain mediaeval bhaktic schools in India, there is the whole world opened by the translation of Sanskrit works into Persian, and Persian and Arabic works into Sanskrit and other Indian languages during the Moghul period. The *Majmaᶜ al-baḥrayn* of Dārā Shukūh and the Persian commentary of Mīr Findiriskī upon that memorable expression of pure *jñāna*, the Yoga *Vasiṣṭha*, are already based upon morphological and structural comparisons.[13] Many other works of this kind also exist which need to be studied and explored. Moreover, the rich intellectual structures of Hinduism and Buddhism naturally present many resemblances to Islamic intellectuality, since all of them possess a traditional character. These resemblances can be best brought to light through the comparative method. The Advaita Vedanta school of Sankara can obviously be best understood by a Muslim by comparing it with the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) of Ibn ᶜArabī and his followers; for a Muslim who cannot understand the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is unlikely to comprehend the Advaita doctrine, which is like the reflection of the

former doctrine in another spiritual universe. There are variations and subtle modifications of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (unity of consciousness) developed by Indian Sufis and unknown in other Muslim lands precisely because of the challenging presence of certain Hindu metaphysical doctrines, especially Sankara's non-dualism. The correlation and the correspondence that exist on the purely metaphysical level can, moreover, be detected on the level of the cosmological sciences and of natural philosophy, and comparative studies can be made with great profit between Hindu teachings and those of other Islamic schools.

As for the Far East, it represents a domain that in its earlier phase should be studied from the perspective of Islamic philosophy almost entirely from the vantage point of comparative philosophy, for here, except for certain early alchemical ideas that reached eastern Islam from China and certain exchanges of ideas during the Mongol period, the whole relation before the 17th century is morphological rather than historical. For a Muslim to understand Lao-Tzu or Chuang-Tzu there is no better way than to make a comparative study between Taoism and Sufism or particular doctrines of the two traditions, such as that of the Universal Man, the understanding of which in the two worlds in question presents striking resemblances. This is a nearly unresearched field, which could be explored extensively to make the Far Eastern tradition better known to Muslims, and the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition more comprehensible for the people of the Far East and especially for those of Japan, where there now seems to be a genuine interest in Islamic metaphysics and philosophy among a few scholars.

As for the later centuries, from the seventeenth century onward, one sees the penetration of Islamic teachings into China and works written in Chinese and using neo-Confucian categories but dealing with Islamic metaphysics as we see in the works of Wang Tai-Yü. The discovery of such texts has in fact opened a whole new field of comparative studies of Islamic and Confucian thought, a field that is still hardly explored and is bound to produce many works of much significance in the future.[14]

In conclusion then, it can be said that for Muslims them-

selves the comparative method can play a basic role in making them aware of the great Indian schools or daranas such as the Sankhya as well as the corresponding schools of other major civilizations of the East and also in making the Western intellectual tradition more readily understandable in its true nature, revealing to them the unstable shortcomings and weaknesses of modern philosophy, a philosophy which many have taken much too seriously until now. It can be an instrument in combating the sense of inferiority towards the West which has developed among so many modernized Muslims, and a necessary shock to awaken them from their hypnotic trance before the modern West. For non-Muslims interested in an understanding of Islamic metaphysics and philosophy, the comparative method can be instrumental in removing the erroneous conception of Islamic philosophy as merely a phase in the transmission of ideas to the West. This method can also help to reveal the immense riches contained in the Islamic intellectual tradition and to make manifest the true structure of this tradition as it stands between the traditions of the Orient and those of the Mediterranean world and the West. Finally, when applied to the operative and practical aspects of Islamic spirituality, the comparative method as envisaged by us can uncover before the eyes of modern man treasures which can provide for his profound spiritual needs. For these and many other reasons the comparative approach deserves to be applied to many aspects of the Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage. It cannot but enrich present-day knowledge of a tradition of which many elements are still unexplored. And it cannot but provide some of the keys with which modern man can open the doors of the prison within which he has confined himself through his own ignorance and forgetfulness.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. On the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* and *al-falsafah* in Islam see S. H. Nasr, "The Meaning and Role of "Philosophy" in Islam," Studia Islamica, Vol. 37, 1973, pp. 57-80.

2. On the basic distinction between Oriental metaphysics, which as already mentioned is wedded to a spiritual discipline, and profane philosophy, see R. Guénon, La Métaphysique orientale, Paris, Éditions traditionnelles, 1951, translated by J. C. Cooper, "Oriental Metaphysics," Tomorrow (London), Vol. 12, 1964, pp. 616; also in The Sword of Gnosis, pp. 40-56. It need hardly be mentioned, at least for those acquainted with the contemporary traditional writers in the West such as Guénon, Coomaraswamy, T. Burckhardt and especially F. Schuon, that the approach of these writers represents the application of the "comparative method" at its highest and most sublime level, an achievement that is made possible by the presence of a remarkable power of intellectual penetration which, at the level displayed in these writings, can come solely from attachment to a tradition and the realization of its metaphysical teachings.

3. See E. Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1937.

4. Comparison through bringing out contrasts is the very opposite of what so many modernized Muslims seek to do by belittling the contrasts and exaggerating insignificant similarities between the teachings of various Islamic schools and profane philosophy in order to show that Islam is "modern" after all.

5. See S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, New York, Barnes & Noble, 1992, Introduction.

6. This has been already attempted by S. Pines in his well-known Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre, New York, Garland Publishings, 1987.

7. As far as the Far East is concerned, the already cited (Chap. 3, note 13) studies of T. Izutsu and Murata et al. are unique. For India there are a few studies made mostly by Indian scholars and one or two by Persians, but most of them deal with historical influences rather than morphological comparisons.

8. The paralyzing effect of modern Western thought upon the East in general and the Muslim world in particular is proven by the fact that in the hundreds of comparative studies made by Orientals themselves between various Eastern sages and Western figures practically no attention has been paid to the authentic representatives of the

Western metaphysical and spiritual tradition. For every hundred studies which compare a Sankara or an Ibn ᶜArabī with some "Idealistic" follower of Hegel,, hardly one seeks to compare them with a Dionysius the Areopagite, an Erigena, an Eckhart or an Angelus Silesius.

9. The writings of Bergstrasser, Walzer, Badawi, Goerr and many others have brought into the open the significance of Islamic philosophical sources for material lost in the original Greek, including especially the writings of the Alexandrian commentators and Galen.

10. See P. Kingsley, Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

11. See, for example, H. Corbin; also S. H. Nasr "The Life of Mysticism and Philosophy in Iran: Pre-Islamic and Islamic," in Nasr, The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, London, Curzon, 1996, pp. 3-9.

12. A notable example of this kind of study is H. Corbin, En Islam iranien, 4 Vols., Paris, Gallimard, 1971-72, where comparative studies have also been made between Islamic schools and Taoism on the one hand and the Grail tradition in the West on the other.

13. See, for example, D. Shayegan, Hindouisme et soufisme, Paris, Edition de la Différence, 1980; also F. Mujtabai, Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations, New Delhi, National Book Bureau, 1978, pp. 60 ff.

14. Sachiko Murata and Tu Wei-ming have been pioneers in this field. See their work already cited in chap. 3, fn. 13.

Part III

The Islamic Tradition and the Current Problems of Modern Man

CHAPTER 5
THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF WESTERN MAN AND THE MESSAGE OF SUFISM

The need to recover a vision of the Center becomes ever more urgent for Western man as the illusory world he has created around himself in order to forget the loss of the transcendent dimension in his life begins to reveal ever more fully its true character. In such a situation, the response cannot, of course, come from anywhere but sacred tradition in all its authentic forms. But inasmuch as we are concerned here with Islam, the last of these traditions to manifest itself on the scene of human history, it is to this tradition that we shall confine ourselves, although much of what we have to say here would apply to other traditions as well. Moreover, since in viewing a mountain from far away it is first of all the peak that is seen and then sought after, it is Sufism, the peak as well as the spiritual essence and esoteric dimension of Islam, which attracts most of those from the outside who feel the need to recover the Center by submitting themselves to the message from the Center in its Islamic form. The amazing increase of interest in the West in recent years in the study of Sufism, much of which is unfortunately diverted by counterfeit presentations of Sufi teachings, is a result of both the growing spiritual need felt by many men and women today and the particular characteristics which Sufism possesses as the esoteric dimension of the Islamic tradition. A perspicacious application of the comparative method, taking into account the structure of the Islamic and the Occidental traditions, would reveal that nearly every aspect of

the Islamic tradition, from the procedures of law at *Sharīᶜite* courts to the description of Divine Beauty in poetry, can be of immense benefit in solving the problems of modern man. But it would also show that it is most of all the purely metaphysical and gnostic teachings of Islam, contained primarily in Sufism,[1] that can provide the answers to the most pressing intellectual needs of men today, and that it is the spiritual presence contained within Sufism that can quench more readily the thirst of aspirants in search of God.

Today the need to benefit from the teachings of sacred tradition leads naturally, because of the anomalous situation of the modern world where the usual channels of transmission no longer exist, to the heart or to the most universal aspect of various sacred traditions, to the Bhagavad-Gītā and the Tao-Te Ching, rather than to their more outward expressions. Islam is no exception to this general tendency, and as more Westerners seek outside the confines of their own religion for ways of escaping from the labyrinth within which they have become imprisoned, and turn in the direction of Islam, the interest in Sufism and in its amazingly rich message grows, a message which on the doctrinal level contains so wide a range, from the simple aphorisms of Abu Madyan to the vast metaphysical compendia of Ibn ᶜArabī, from the gnostic prayers of Abuʾl-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī to the ocean of mystical poetry of Rūmī.

Before turning specifically to Sufism, it is necessary to make a few general remarks about the meaning of sacred tradition and its relation to the present spiritual and intellectual needs of Western man. In order to understand sacred tradition and to discuss the truth in its metaphysical sense, there must be (besides interest and the sense of need) the aid of Heaven and the presence of a discerning intelligence. It is, therefore, necessary first of all to concern ourselves with the meaning of "sacred tradition," of which Islam is an eminent example and also to the real nature of man's present-day spiritual needs. So much confusion has been cast upon these subjects as a result of the recent "pseudo-spiritual" explosion in the West that there is no way of understanding what kind of contribution Sufism can

make to the task of saving man from his current plight without clearing the ground of prevalent errors and misconceptions.

Today many people speak of tradition in ways very different from the usage we employ here and throughout our writings. It is therefore necessary to clarify the meaning of this key term once again. Those who are acquainted with the majestic works of the traditional authors in the West such as F. Schuon, R. Guénon and A. K. Coomaraswamy already have an understanding of the meaning of this term. It is the definition of tradition contained in the writings of these authors to which we adhere fully in all of our works. Therefore, by "tradition" we do not mean habit or custom or the automatic transmission of ideas and motifs from one generation to another, but rather a set of principles which have descended from Heaven and which are identified at their origin with a particular manifestation of the Divine, along with the application and deployment of these principles at different moments of time and in different conditions for a particular humanity. Tradition is therefore already sacred in itself and the term "sacred tradition" is, in a sense, a pleonasm which we have used only for the sake of emphasis. Moreover, tradition is both immutable and a living continuity, containing within itself the science of Ultimate Reality and the means for the actualization and realization of this knowledge at different moments of time and space. To quote Schuon, "Tradition is not a childish and outmoded mythology but a science that is terribly real."[2] Tradition is ultimately a sacred science, a scientia sacra,[3] rooted in the nature of Reality, and itself the only integral means of access to this Reality, which at once surrounds man and shines at the innermost center of his being. It is the call from the Center which alone can allow man to return from the rim to the Center.

As far as Sufism is concerned, strictly speaking it should not be classified along with other integral traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, because Sufism is itself a part of Islam and not an independent tradition. Islam can be spoken of as a tradition in the same way as one speaks of Christianity or Buddhism, whereas Sufism must be understood as a dimension

of the Islamic tradition. This rather obvious point needs to be labored because often today in certain circles Sufism is taken out of its Islamic context with particular motives in mind and then discussed along with other Oriental or Occidental traditions.

Sufism is actually like the flower of the tree of Islam, and in another sense the sap of that tree. Or it can be called the jewel in the crown of the Islamic tradition. But whatever image is used, there remains the undeniable fact that, taken out of the context of Islam, Sufism cannot be fully understood, and its methods, of course, can never be practiced efficaciously, to say the least. Nor can one do justice to the wholeness of the Islamic tradition and its immensely rich spiritual possibilities by putting aside its inner dimension.[4] In speaking about Sufism, therefore, in reality we shall be speaking about the Islamic tradition itself in its most inward and universal aspect.

As for the question of the present needs of Western man which the message of sacred tradition in general and Sufism in particular can fulfill, it is essential to analyze fully its content and meaning, considering the cloud of illusion which surrounds modern man and makes the clear discernment of his environment and "living space," both external and internal, well-nigh impossible. As already mentioned in the first chapter, there has been so much talk during the past century about change, becoming and evolution that the permanent and abiding inner nature of man has been nearly forgotten, along with the most profound needs of this inner man. In fact the pseudo-dogma of evolution, as generally understood, which continues to dominate the horizon of much of modern anthropology and philosophy in the teeth of rapidly accumulating evidence concerning the essentially unchanged nature of man during the many millennia that have passed since his entering upon the stage of terrestrial history, has made it impossible for those who adhere to it to understand who man is.[5] Moreover, the permanent nature of man having been forgotten, the needs of man are reduced to the sphere of accidental changes which affect only the outer layer and crust of man's being. When people speak of human needs today, most often they mean the man who is confined to

the rim and cut off from the Center, the man who is only accidentally human and essentially animal, the man who no longer fulfills his primordial mandate as God's vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth.

In reality, the needs of man, as far as the total nature of man is concerned, remain forever the same, precisely because of man's unchanging nature. "Man is what he is, or he is nothing."[6] The situation of man in the universal hierarchy of being, his standing between the two unknowns which comprise his state before terrestrial life and his state after death, his need for a "shelter" in the vast stretches of cosmic existence and his deep need for certainty (*yaqīn* in the vocabulary of Sufism) remain unchanged. This latter element, the need to gain certainty, is in fact so fundamental that the Sufis have described the stages of gaining spiritual perfection as so many steps in the attainment of certainty.[7]

The very fact that in the West there is so much interest today in Oriental metaphysics and spirituality, the fact that so many people in Europe and even more in America search avidly for books of instruction or poetry and music associated with Sufism, is itself indirect proof of the fact that there is a profounder nature in man which does not "evolve," a nature whose needs remain unchanged. This more permanent nature may be temporarily eclipsed but it cannot be permanently obliterated. The rationalistic philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries never dreamt that a century or two after them so many people in the Western world would again become interested in religion, in metaphysics and cosmology, and even in the occult sciences, which in their unadulterated form are branches of the traditional cosmological sciences. These men would be surprised to discover that, a century or two after them, the works of Taoist sages or the Rishis of India or Sufi masters would be read more avidly than much of their own writings. The rationalistic philosophers of the past two centuries along with their anti-rationalist but still profane opponents regarded only the outer crust or rim of man's being, and they saw in its condensation and consolidation, its gradual separation from the world of the Spirit or the Center, a progress and an evolution

which they thought would be a continuous process. They did not realize that the crust would break of its own accord as a result of the advancement of the very process of its solidification, and that the needs of the inner man would manifest themselves once again on the scale we see before us today.

It was once asked of ᶜAlī what existed before Adam. Echoing the teachings of the Prophet, he answered, "Adam." The question was repeated. He again answered, "Adam," and added that if he were to answer this question to the end of time he would repeat, "Adam." The profound meaning of this saying is that man in his essential reality has not undergone evolution and that there is no "before man" in the sense of a temporal predecessor or a state from which man developed "in time." A million years ago men already buried their dead and believed in the Invisible World.[8] Over ten thousand years ago, man not only produced masterpieces of art but even described the motion of the heavens in a most remarkable manner in myths and stories which reveal a power of "abstraction" that could match any of the feats of men of later periods of history.[9]

It is this man—obliterated temporarily by the progressive and evolutionary theories of the past two centuries in the West—to whom tradition addresses itself and it is this inner man whom tradition seeks to liberate from the imprisonment of the ego and the suffocating influence of the purely externalized and forgetful aspect of the outer man. Moreover, it is tradition alone which possesses the means for his liberation, and not the pseudo-religions so prevalent today, which, seeing the resurgence of the needs of the inner man, try to entice those with a less discerning eye by means of parodies of the teachings of the sacred traditions, to which they almost invariably add something of the evolutionary pseudo-philosophy to make sure that men do not discover who they really are. But that inner man continues to abide within all men and to make its demands upon man no matter how far he seeks to escape from his own Center and no matter what means he uses to obliterate the traces of the inner man upon what he calls "himself."

Of course when all is said concerning the permanent needs

of man—needs which in fact must be emphasized in the strongest terms possible because they have been so forgotten in the modern world—it must be remembered that these needs concern only one pole of man's being, namely the essential pole. As far as the other pole is concerned, the pole which involves man's temporality and the historico-cultural conditions that colour the outer crust of his being, it can be said that man's needs have changed. They have changed not in their essence but in their mode and external form. Even in traditional societies, all of which have been based on immutable transcendent principles, the forms in which the spiritual needs of a Japanese have been fulfilled has not been the same as that of an Arab nor have these forms been externally the same over the centuries. So much more is this true in the modern world, where men live in a desacralized milieu divorced from principles, where the psyche is separated from the Spirit which is its own source of life, where the experience of time and space, not to speak of all kinds of human relations, have altered completely and where the sense of authority has gradually disappeared. In such conditions there naturally appear new modes through which even the deepest human needs must be fulfilled.

The very fact of the advancement of the process of the consolidation of the world has introduced cracks in the closed world of materialism which permit not only the dark forces from below but also light from above to enter into this world.[10] This process causes at the same time a reawakening of man to his real needs, which leads naturally to a desperate attempt to find means of fulfilling these needs. But precisely because of the changed external circumstances, many modern men do not understand the conditions or are not willing to undergo the necessary sacrifices to become worthy of receiving the message of Heaven, which in its unadulterated form is contained only within the living orthodox and sacred traditions of the world. Also, many authorities from these traditions—leaving aside of the pretenders who have recently flooded the Western scene—have become habituated to the traditional world from which they have issued and therefore are not aware of the differences exist-

ing between the psyche of Western man and that of men of traditional societies, nor of the different forms that Western man's spiritual needs take because of the particular world in which he has been nurtured.

In speaking of present needs, it is essential to keep in mind both these poles, namely the permanent nature of man's needs, which makes all the traditional teachings about man and his final end pertinent and in fact vital, and the changed external modes of man's needs due to the particular experiences of modern man, which necessitate the application of these teachings to existing conditions. It must be remembered that traditional authority and authenticity must be preserved, that Truth cannot evolve, that it is man who must make himself worthy of becoming the recipient of the message of Heaven, not vice versa, that Truth cannot be distorted to suit the passing whims and fashions of a particular period and that there is an objective Reality that determines the value of man and his thoughts and actions and finally judges them and determines the mode of his existence in the world to come. At the same time, it must be recalled that this sacred tradition must be applied to the particular problems of modern man with a consideration of the anomalous conditions in which he lives, without this process distorting or destroying the authenticity of the tradition. The modern world is witness to an array of men and women and organizations which attempt to cater to the spiritual needs of modern man, ranging from authentic masters and organizations from the East often unaware of the particular nature of the audience they are addressing,[11] to the rare few who have succeeded in applying traditional teachings to the particular conditions of modern man,[12] to the vast number of pseudo-masters and dubious organizations, ranging from the innocuous to the veritably satanic, which remind one of the saying of Christ about false prophets arising at the end of time. To draw from the resources of sacred tradition to fulfill present needs necessitates remaining totally within the matrix of sacred tradition and at the same time applying its methods and teachings to a world in which men have needs that are at once perennial and

yet conditioned by the particular experiences of modern man.

An important condition which has colored deeply the mental processes of modern man and today lies at the heart of the new religious movement in the West, albeit usually unconsciously, is Cartesian dualism and the reaction which has set in against materialism in the West within the context of this dualism. Cartesian dualism divided reality into the material and the mental, positing a non-material substance which somehow is able to gain knowledge of the levels of existence which it reduces to a single quantitative reality. The excessive materialism of the past centuries has now led many people to reject this materialism itself. But just as in physics a reaction is opposed to an existing action identified with matter on the same level of physical reality, so also has this philosophical and religious reaction set in within the already existing framework of classical Cartesian dualism. For a large number of people, the reaction against materialism means, almost unconsciously, attraction towards the other pole of Cartesian dualism, namely the non-material, but without there being any discrimination within the non-material domain between the Spirit and the psyche, the *ruh* and the *nafs* of Sufism. Hence, for many people who are unaware of this fundamental distinction, the psychic and mental realm have come to replace the spiritual and the religious.

Islam teaches that the rebellion against God takes place on the level of the psyche, not on that of the body. The flesh is only an instrument for the tendencies originating within the psyche. It is the psyche that must be trained and disciplined so as to become prepared for its wedding to the Spirit. Both the angelic and the demonic forces manifest themselves in this intermediate psychic plane, which is neither purely material nor purely spiritual. The paradisal and the infernal states of the soul refer to the macrocosmic counterparts of the various levels of this intermediate substance as it becomes molded and transformed by the Spirit and angelic or demonic influences. This substance, moreover, within the microcosm, or man, stretches from the corporeal to the Divine Center within the heart of man. Therefore, to identify all that is non-material with the sacred or

spiritual is sheer folly and a most dangerous error, which has come into being as a result of the optical illusion lingering from the delimitation of reality into two domains by Cartesian dualism. But it is an error that is very prevalent in the new religious movements in the West and especially in America today, an error which in certain cases can open the soul of man to the most infernal and dissipating influences, throwing the personality of those who fall prey to them into disequilibrium. To identify simply the non-material with the spiritual is to misunderstand the nature of Reality, the complexity of the human soul, the source and reality of evil and the spiritual work necessary to reach the Fountain of Life which alone can satisfy in a permanent and not an illusory and transient manner the spiritual thirst of man.

This mistaking of the psychic for the spiritual, so characteristic of our times, is reinforced by another powerful tendency issuing from man's need to break the boundaries of his limited world of external experience. The Sufis have always taught that man is in quest of the Infinite and that even his endless effort toward the gaining of material possessions and his dissatisfaction with what he has is an echo of this thirst, which cannot be quenched by the finite. That is why the Sufis consider the station of contentment (*riḍā'*)[13] to be an exalted spiritual condition attainable only by those who have reached the "proximity" of the Infinite and have shed the bonds of finite existence. This need to seek the Infinite and overcome the limits of whatever is finite is clearly discernible in the new religious ferment in the West today. Many modern men are tired of the finite psychological and physical experiences of everyday life no matter how materially comfortable that life may be. Having no access to the authentic spiritual experience which in traditional societies provides the natural means of breaking the limits of finite existence, they turn to new psychic experiences of all kinds which open for them new worlds and horizons, even if they be infernal. The great concern with psychic phenomena, "trips," extraordinary "experiences," and the like, is deeply related to this inner urge to break the suffocating and limited world of everyday life

in a civilization which has no purpose beyond moving with accelerated speed toward an illusory ideal state of material well-being that is always just round the corner.

This tendency, added to the one which unconsciously identifies the noncorporeal with the spiritual, has succeeded in bringing about a most dangerous confusion in the religious life of modern man in the West and particularly in America, where the need for a rediscovery of the world of the Spirit is keenly felt. From the Sufi point of view, which has always distinguished clearly between the psychic and the spiritual, so many of those who claim to speak in the name of the Spirit today are really speaking in the name of the psyche, and are taking advantage of the thirst of modern man for something beyond the range of experiences that modern industrial civilization has made possible for him. It is precisely this confusion that lies at the heart of the profound disorder one observes in the religious field in the West today, and which enables elements that are as far removed as possible from the sacred to absorb the energies of men of good intention and to dissipate rather than to integrate their psychic forces.

The sacred, as already stated, is related to the world of the Spirit and not of the psyche. It is whole and holy; it illuminates and integrates rather than causing men to wander aimlessly through the labyrinth that characterizes the psychic and mental worlds whenever these worlds are deprived of the light of the Spirit. The sacred, precisely because it comes from God, asks of us all that we are. To sacralize life and to reach the sacred we must become ourselves sacred, like a sacred work of art. We must chisel the substance of our soul into an icon which will reveal us as we really are in the Divine Presence, as we were when we were created, the imago Dei; for as the Prophet of Islam has said, "God created man upon His image." In order for man to become this work of art, to become himself again, he must surrender and dedicate himself fully to the commands of the Spirit, to the sacred. It is only the sacred that can enable man to remove the veil which hides his true nature from himself and makes him forget his own primordial, theomorphic

nature (the *fiṭrah* mentioned in the Quran). And it is only the sacred, which comes from the Spirit and not the psyche, that can be the source of ethics, of aesthetics in its traditional sense, of metaphysical doctrine and of methods of realization. The psyche may appear fascinating or absorbing. But in itself it is always no more than amorphous, full of impressions that are transitory and partial. It is only the spiritual or the sacred that is permanent and total and that precisely because of its totality embraces the psychic and even the corporeal aspects of man and transforms and illuminates them.

The application of sacred tradition—whether it be Sufism or some other Way—to the actual needs of man cannot begin at a more critical point than this present juncture of human history, where it can provide the means of discerning between the spiritual and the psychic and, by extension, between those whose teachings are of a truly spiritual nature and those whose message is rooted only in the psychic and supported solely by psychic phenomena, related to experiences which without the protective matrix of sacred tradition can lead to the most infernal depths of cosmic existence and to states that are much more dangerous to the soul of man than various forms of crass materialism.

Turning to the Sufi tradition itself, it must be said that the understanding of it, as of many other traditions, is made difficult in the modern West because of the presence of another optical illusion which mistakes the mental understanding of metaphysics for the full realization of its truths. This illusion, which is the result of the separation between the mental activity of certain men and the rest of their being, and which is directly related to a lack of spiritual virtues, is a major hindrance in the application of the sacred teachings of various traditions to the present needs of Western men. There are those who possess intellectual intuition, itself a gift of Heaven, and who can understand the doctrines of Sufism or other forms of Oriental metaphysics, but who are not willing to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the sacred tradition whose flower they are able to scent from far away.[14] Such people confuse their

vision of the mountain peak, theoria in its original sense, with actually being on top of the mountain. They therefore tend to belittle all the practical, moral and operative teachings of tradition as being below their level of concern. Most of all they mistake the emphasis upon the attainment of spiritual virtues (*faḍā'il* in Sufism) for sentimentality, and faith (*īmān*) for "common religion" belonging only to the exoteric level,[15] forgetting the fact that the greatest saints and sages have spoken most of all of spiritual virtues and that one of the most widely used names for Sufism is "Muḥammadan poverty" (*al-faqr al-muḥammadī*).[16] Without this poverty or *faqr*, the cup of man's existence has no empty space into which the nectar of Divine Wisdom can be poured. Without it no spiritual attainment is possible, no matter how keen the intelligence may be.

This prevalent error of identifying the theoretical understanding of metaphysics with spiritual realization is related to the anomalous situation of our times in which the purest metaphysical teachings of various traditions are easily available in translation for just a few dollars at every bookshop, works ranging from the Song of Solomon to the Tao-Te Ching. Obviously, such was not the case in the normal historical situation. In a traditional society, most of those drawn to the metaphysical and gnostic aspects of their tradition are made to undergo gradual instruction which prepares them for the reception of gnostic doctrines only after long training. Moreover, their knowledge of tradition is through personal contact. They live the exoteric form of the tradition—which is absolutely necessary and indispensable—in their everyday lives, and they contact esoterism most often by encountering a master or his disciples, or by visiting the tomb of a saint, or by having a dream which incites them to seek a particular master or go to a particular place. Even when their contact with esoterism is through reading, it is most often through literature and parables that their interest in the Way is gradually aroused. For every thousand people in the Islamic world who read the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ or Rūmī, only one or two read the purely doctrinal treatises of Sufism.

Today in the West there is a truly anomalous situation in

which the contact of most men with tradition must of necessity begin from the top and through the channel of the written word or books, which play a special role in an age when the usual channels of oral transmission have become blocked in so many parts of the world. As a matter of fact, the very availability of the highest metaphysical teachings of not one but most of the sacred traditions today—not to speak of the remarkable expositions of the authentic contemporary traditional writers in the West—is a result of the Divine Mercy, which has made possible this compensation during an age of spiritual eclipse, inasmuch as one irregularity deserves another. But the danger present in this situation is precisely the mistaking of the mental understanding of some sacred text for the living of a tradition, which involves not only the mind but the whole of man's being.

With this reserve in mind, it must nevertheless be added that even on the plane of the mind the presence of expositions of traditional doctrines, whether they be of a metaphysical or a cosmological order, can fulfill one of the deepest needs of modern man, who can be characterized as a being who thinks too much and often wrongly, and who is over-cerebral. Even a mental understanding of traditional doctrines can therefore be like a blanket of snow which brings with it peace and calm and quiets the agitation of the skeptical and questioning mind. It can bestow upon man an intellectual certitude which corresponds to what in traditional Sufi terminology is called "the science of certainty" (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*)[17] and therefore make the person who has attained such a degree of knowledge aware of the fact that the ultimate aim of knowledge is not to collect an ever-increasing number of facts and to chart areas beyond the present "frontiers" of knowledge, but to reach the Center within and to gain a vision of or even become the knowledge which has always been and will always be. This calming of the agitated mind by providing answers to questions posed by reason, answers which are the fruit of revelation, illumination or intellection, then provides the necessary background and condition for the actual illumination of the mind and, in fact, of the whole being of him whose reason has been nourished by traditional knowledge rather than having been left to its own machinations.[18]

Considering the importance of doctrinal works in this

process of calming the mind and preparing the person of a contemplative bent for true intellection, it is unfortunate that, as far as Islamic metaphysics is concerned, few of its riches in this domain have been translated into English in comparison with what one finds from Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist sources. A few of the greatest masterpieces of Islamic metaphysics, such as the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜArabī and *al-Insān al-kāmil* of al-Jīlī are now known and partially translated,[19] but a vast treasury of works by both Sufis and Islamic theosophers such as Suhrawardī, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Ibn Turkah al-Iṣfahānī, Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā, who have composed major doctrinal and metaphysical treatises, remain almost completely inaccessible to a Westerner without a mastery of Arabic or Persian.[20] In this way, the application of the teachings of Islam in its esoteric and metaphysical aspects to the present-day needs of Western man is handicapped by a lack of well-translated material which would make the vast treasures of this tradition accessible to those capable of reaping their fruit. Also, the true appreciation of all that the Islamic tradition can offer to contemporary man has become difficult, since in the case of other traditions their most universal teachings are relatively well-known, but in the case of Islam most studies in Western languages have been devoted to its legalistic and formal aspects, while its most universal aspects have not received the attention they deserve at least not in an unadulterated form. To this obstacle must be added the negative image of Islam propagated by so much of the media in the West.

Some who wish to follow a tradition today are in fact deceived by this situation into thinking that Islam is at best concerned only with law, Divine justice and punishment, rigor, etc., while it is possible to follow other traditions by simply reading their gnostic treatises or even by taking some of their particular initiatic practices out of context and practicing it, without having to be burdened with moral considerations or questions of Divine justice and punishment.

Actually, this is a most unfortunate modern delusion arising from the fact that, as a result of a reaction against an unintelligible moralism within certain forms of modern Christianity, many people today belittle the importance of morality, and as a

result of the rebellion of modern man against Heaven and of the loss of the meaning of authority, the importance of the fear of God in religious life has been well-nigh forgotten by most Western men today. The prophetic utterance, "Fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom" (*raʾs al-ḥikmah makhāfat Allāh*), which echoes the well-known Pauline dictum, holds true not only for Islam or Christianity but for all traditions. In Islam there is a Divine Law (*Sharīʿah*) which concerns man's actions and which all Muslims, Sufis or non-Sufis, must follow.[21] There is also emphasis upon the fear of God, and an eschatology which is related to God's judgment of human action on earth. But then these elements are also present, in other forms, in Hinduism and other Oriental traditions. Hinduism has not only produced the Gītā and the Vedānta but also elaborate treatises on *pralaya*, the Last Judgment, and on *karma* and the serious consequences of human action on earth for man's posthumous states. It would be the worst illusion to imagine that one can practice, let us say, Yoga and forget all about morality or the consequences of human acts in the eyes of God simply because one has moved from one tradition to another. In every integral tradition one can find the fear, the love and the knowledge of God in one form or another. As al-Ghazzālī has said, he who fears the Creator runs towards Him and loves Him, and he who loves Him knows Him.

The historic manifestations of Sufism reveal the phases of fear (*makhāfah*), love (*maḥabbah*) and knowledge (*maʿrifah*), and the cycle repeats itself within the soul of every man who is able to attain spiritual realization. If one can complain from one point of view that the gnostic and metaphysical works of Islam have not been translated widely enough, one can be thankful from another point of view that the integral teachings of Islam, including the *Sharīʿah*, are there to test the seriousness of those who would aspire to reach its inner chamber, by requiring them to become first of all aware of the justice and majesty of God. Such an awareness creates in man an awe and fear that is absolutely positive and that melts away from the substance of the soul all that is alien to its primordial nature.

In fact, it is in order to evade this test and this protecting

criterion that recently pretenders have appeared in the West who wish to divorce Sufism from Islam and present it as if it had nothing to do with the teachings of Islam and its *Sharīᶜah*, which provides the Divine matrix for human action and protects the man who follows it from the wrath of God. This effort is no more than sheer delusion. In all authentic manifestations of Sufism, the fear of God, described so majestically in the Quran and incorporated in the attitudes promulgated by the *Sharīᶜah*, prepares the ground for the love of God, and the love of God in turn leads to gnosis, the knowledge of God, which cannot sink its roots into the being of man unless the soil of this being has been prepared for such a Divine plant by the fear of God and His love, a love which in Islamic spirituality always accompanies knowledge.

So far, most of what has been said concerns all traditions, but it is now appropriate to ask what is unique about Sufism itself as it concerns the present needs of man. There is an Arabic saying which states that "the doctrine of Unity is unique" (*al-tawḥīd wāḥid*). This means that at the highest level there is only one truth, in which all traditions are unified. But as the Divine Truth descends from the one peak downwards towards men, it takes on the characteristics which distinguish one tradition from another.

Sufism, being the inner dimension of Islam, shares, in its formal aspect, in the particular features of this tradition. Since Islam is based on Unity (*al-tawḥīd*), all of its manifestations reflect unity in one way or another; this is especially true of Sufism, in which the principles of the revelation are most directly reflected. The presence of the principle of unity in Sufism means, among other things, that its methods and practices unify what in other traditions are usually separate and distinct. To use the terminology of Hinduism—which is a miracle on the religious plane because of the different spiritual forms that have existed within it—the way of *karma* Yoga, *bhakti* Yoga and *jñāna* Yoga are combined in Sufism into a single way, one might say into an "integral Yoga." It is especially important to note that whereas in Hinduism the *jñāna* and *bhakti* types are quite distinct,[22] Sufi spirituality is essentially

a *jñāna* one which, however, is never divorced from the *bhaktic* element. Some Sufis may emphasize one aspect more than another. Some, like Ibn ᶜArabī, Ibn ᶜAṭaᵓillāh al-Iskandarī and Shabistarī, may speak more of gnosis (*maᶜrifah*) and some like ᶜAṭṭār and Ḥāfiẓ more of love. But in no instance does one find in Sufism a path of knowledge completely separated from love or a path of love without the element of gnosis, such as the kind of love mysticism found in Christianity and also in mediaeval Hinduism. Moreover, this combination of knowledge and love in Sufism is always based on the support of the *Sharīᶜah*, or, in a sense, on a way of work or action.

Also because of the unitary nature of the Islamic revelation, the contemplative and active ways have never been totally separated either outwardly or inwardly in Sufism. There is no outward monasticism in Islam, and the most intense contemplative life in Islam is carried out within the matrix of life within society. The Sufi has died to the world inwardly while outwardly he still participates in the life of society and bears the responsibilities of the station of life in which destiny has placed him. In fact he performs the most perfect action, because his acts emanate from an integrated will and an illuminated intelligence. Rather than being in any way contradictory, the contemplative and active lives complement each other in all Islamic spirituality,[23] as we shall have occasion to discuss more fully in the next chapter, and the methods and techniques of the contemplative life are such that they can be performed in whatever outward circumstances a person may find himself and in whichever form of active life he may have to participate.

This unitive character of Sufism, both in its own methods and in its relation to man's outward life in society, offers obvious advantages for men living in the modern world, where inner withdrawal is usually more of a possibility than is outward separation from the world. Also the unitive nature of Sufism is a powerful remedy for the disintegrated life from which so many people in the modern world suffer. The total integration of the personality achieved in Sufi training is the goal sought by much of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, which, however, can

never achieve this goal, for their methods as practiced today are cut off from the grace of the Spirit which alone can integrate the psyche. As a result, they usually lead to its disintegration rather than to its integration. God has placed religion in the world to enable man to overcome his complexes, in addition to performing numerous other functions for him. Any caricature and parody of religion and especially of initiatic techniques cannot but result in a caricature and parody of the effect religion has had over the ages in removing man's complexes and integrating his personality.

The pertinent question that will undoubtedly be asked is: granted that Sufism does contain these characteristics, what are the possibilities of practicing it? Of course one cannot gauge the mercy of Heaven, for the "spirit bloweth where it listeth," but as far as the traditional teachings of Sufism are concerned, it is always emphasized that there is no practice of Sufism possible except through a master who is referred to traditionally as *shaykh*, *murshid* or *pīr*. The only exception is that of "special individuals" (*afrād*) who are disciples of the ever-living but hidden prophet Khaḍir[24] and who are in any case chosen for the Way by Heaven. Therefore this possibility is not an option for man to choose. As far as the aspirant is concerned, the only way open to him is to find an authentic master. The question of the practical possibility of living according to the disciplines of Sufism, therefore, comes down essentially to the possibility of finding an authentic master who can instruct the disciple as to how and what he should practice. As far as the Western world and especially America are concerned, it is necessary to mention the danger of false masters, of those who pretend to be guides without possessing the necessary qualifications, which are given by God alone. Even in classical times, when the danger of "false prophets" mentioned by Christ was much less than in these late hours of human history, authentic masters took care to warn against the perils of submitting oneself to an unqualified "master." In his incomparable *Mathnawī*, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī says:

> Since there is many a devil who hath the face of Adam, it is not well to give your hand to every hand.[25]
> The vile man will steal the language of dervishes, that he may thereby chant a spell over (fascinate and deceive) one who is simple,
> 'The work of (holy) men is (as) light and heat, the work of vile men is trickery and shamelessness.
> They make a woolen garb for the purpose of begging.
> They give the title of Aḥmad (Muḥammad) to Bā-Musaylim ...
> The wine of God, its seal (last result) is pure musk, (but) as for (the other) wine, its seal is stench and torment.[26]

There is a mystery in the way man chooses a master and a spiritual path, to which allusion is made by Rūmī himself and which cannot be solved by rational analysis alone. The problem is this: how can a candidate for initiation who does not as yet possess spiritual vision distinguish a true master from a false one when there must already be a true master to actualize the possibilities within the disciple and to enable him to distinguish the wheat from the chaff? Herein lies that mysterious relationship between the Spirit and its earthly embodiments which escapes being understood discursively. Man believes that he chooses the Way but in reality he is chosen by the Way. What man can do is to pray to find a true master and have reliance upon God while searching. He can, moreover, apply the universal criteria of authenticity and orthodoxy at a time when there are many more pretenders than when Rūmī wrote about them, at a time to which Christ referred in his initiatic saying, "Many are called but few are chosen."

The Truth has a way of protecting itself from profanation, but the soul of man can be destroyed if molded in the hands of someone who does not possess the right qualifications and who is no more than a pretender. Better to remain an agnostic or a materialist than to become a follower of some pseudo-spiritual movement which cannot but do harm to what is most precious

within man. The Sufis compare man to an egg that must be placed under a hen for a specific period in order to hatch. If, however, it is placed underneath a hen which leaves the egg early or does not take the necessary care of it, then the egg will never hatch and cannot even be eaten.[27] It will become useless and can only be thrown away. This parable depicts the danger of placing oneself in the hands of a pretender, in the care of those who brush aside centuries of tradition for a supposedly higher and more "evolved" form of spirituality, or who want to crash the gates of Heaven by means of Sufism without the grace and aid of the Prophet of Islam, whose spiritual presence (*barakah*) alone can enable the initiate to rise upon the ladder of perfection extending to Heaven. We live in dangerous times when the possibilities of error are many, but also by compensation the paths towards God are opened before men in ways never dreamt of before. It remains for each individual to practice discernment and to distinguish between the true and the false, between the way of God and the way of Satan, who is traditionally known as the "ape of God."

Despite all the false masters and forms of pseudo-spirituality, there are still authentic Sufi masters, and the possibility of practicing Sufism in the West is certainly present. But we believe that such a possibility will not involve all the people interested in Sufism today. Most likely in the near future Sufism will exercise its influence in the West not on one but on three different levels. First of all, there is the possibility of practicing Sufism in an active way. Such a path is naturally meant for the few. It demands of man complete surrender to the discipline of the Way. To practice it one must follow the famous saying of the Prophet, "Die before you die." One must die to oneself and be reborn spiritually here and now. One must devote oneself to meditation and invocation, to inner purification, to the examining of one's conscience and many other practices prevalent among those who actually walk upon the Path (*sālikūn*). There are already some who practice Sufism seriously in the West, and, besides the pseudo-Sufi movements of little import, certain branches of traditional and orthodox Sufism have

already sunk their roots in the West and have established authentic branches there. This group is surely bound to grow, although it cannot embrace all of those who are attracted to Sufism in the West today.

The second level on which Sufism is likely to influence the West is by presenting Islam in a more appealing form to many who would find in general Islamic practices what they are seeking today in the name of Sufism. Because of a long historical background of conflict with the West, Islam has, until quite recently, been treated in the Occident in the most adverse manner possible. Many who would find exactly what they are looking for in the daily prayers and the fasting of Islam, in its integration of the secular into the sacred, in its dissemination of the sacerdotal function among all men, in its arts and sciences and many other features, are driven away from it because of the way in which it is usually presented to them. Sufism could help to explain Islam by elucidating its most universal and hence, in a sense, most comprehensible aspect, and therefore making it more approachable to outsiders. Usually when people want to study Hinduism they begin with the Bhagavad-Gītā and not the Laws of Manu, whereas in the case of Islam, as already stated, the legalistic aspects are usually taught first and the most universal teachings, if touched upon at all, follow afterwards in a disjointed manner. As it becomes more fully realized that Sufism is an integral part and in fact the heart of Islam and the flower of this tree of revelation, the possibility of the practice of Islam for many who are now attracted to Sufism but who cannot undertake the difficult disciplines of the Path itself will become more evident.

There is no question here of proselytizing, as far as we are concerned, but the fact remains that many in the West are seeking Oriental religious forms to practice and follow in their everyday lives, but put Islam aside because they do not identify it with its spiritual aspect, of which Sufism is the essence. Once this identification is clearly made, Sufism may play a role (and in fact is doing so to some extent already) in the West similar to the role it played in India, Indonesia and West Africa in spreading Islam itself. Of course in the West its method and the

extent of its activity will certainly be different from what we find in the above instances, but its function will be similar. It will open a possibility within Islam for many earnest Western seekers attracted to Sufism today, and it can also make available to them that intermediate region between esoterism and exoterism which is known to those who have studied the structure of Islam carefully.

Finally, there is a third level upon which Sufism can play an important role in the West: that is, as an aid to recollection and reawakening. Because Sufism is a living tradition with a vast treasury of metaphysical and cosmological doctrines, a sacred psychology and psychotherapy rarely studied in the West, a doctrine of sacred art and traditional sciences, it can bring back to life many aspects of the Western tradition forgotten today. Until recently, the usual historical works in Western languages on Islam relegated Sufism, along with other aspects of Islamic intellectuality, back to the thirteenth century, and described it as if it had died out long ago. Now, as more people in the West discover that it is a living tradition, contact with its riches can certainly play the role of reawakening Western man to many of his own forgotten treasures. The trends of the past few decades have not been that hopeful, but the possibility is nevertheless present.

Moreover, Sufism possesses teachings concerning the nature of man and the world about him which contain keys to the solutions of the most acute problems of the modern world, such as the ecological crisis.[28] Its teachings, if conveyed in contemporary language, could aid in solving many present-day problems which have come into being in the first place because of the forgetting of first principles. Its very presence could create, through a kind of "sympathetic vibration," the revival of a more authentic intellectual activity and the revivification of precious aspects of the Western tradition which were covered by the dust created by the storm which shook the West during the period that has paradoxically come to be known as the Renaissance.

If, however, Sufism is to provide for some of the present-day needs of the West, it must be able to preserve its own integrity

and purity. It must be able to resist the powerful forces of deviation, distortion and dilution visible everywhere today. It must serve the world about it like a crystal which gathers the light and disseminates it to its surroundings. At the same time it must be able to address the world around it in a language which that world understands. Sufism cannot leave unanswered the appeal of those who call upon it. Nor can it in any way compromise its principles in order to become more fashionable or more widely heard, to become a fad which would disappear from the scene with the same rapidity with which it had become popular.

In order to present Sufism in a serious manner above and beyond transient fads and fancies, it is therefore necessary to remain strictly traditional and orthodox from the point of view of the Sufi tradition and at the same time intelligible to Western man with the particular mental habits he has acquired and the reactions towards things he has developed within himself. Also, in order really to accept and practice the teachings of Sufism, it is necessary for the modern aspirant to realize that, in fact, he is drowning, that sacred tradition is a rope thrown towards him by the Divine Mercy, and that with its aid alone can he save himself. In the present situation, those who are rooted in the Sufi tradition and who can also expound it in a manner that is comprehensible to modern men and that addresses their real needs bear a great responsibility upon their shoulders. It is for them to preserve the purity and integrity of the message, yet to be able to transmit it to men conditioned by the factors that characterize the modern world. But in performing this task, such men fulfill their highest duty and accomplish the most worthy act of charity, for there is no higher form of charity than the expression of the Truth, which alone can provide for man's deepest and most abiding needs.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. We say "primarily in Sufism" because as far as Islamic esoteric doctrines are concerned Shi^{c}ite gnosis in both its Twelve-Imam and Ismā^{c}īlī forms is also of great importance. Moreover, the theosophy of Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, which developed mostly in Persia and within the bosom of Shi^{c}ism, is of particular importance for solving the present impasse of Western thought because of its innate metaphysical richness, and because it has a more systematic character than the metaphysical expositions of the school of Ibn ^{c}Arabī, to which it is, in fact, related. The comparative method could very profitably be applied to this theosophy to juxtapose its teachings to such subjects as structuralism, evolution, the relation between logic and intuition, etc., with which modern Western thought, in both its religious and its non-religious form, occupies itself. This would be a separate programme to which, without doubt, Muslim intellectuals as well as those in quest of revivifying true intellectual activity in the West will no doubt turn in the future as this theosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*) becomes better known.

2. F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, Foreword, p. ii.

3. For further elaboration of the meaning of scientia sacra see S. H. Nasr, Knowledge and the Sacred, Chap. 4, pp. 130 ff.

4. For the relationship between Sufism and the rest of the Islamic tradition, see F. Schuon, op. cit., Chap. iv; F. Schuon, The Transcendent Unity of Religions, trans. by P. Townsend, London, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1993; S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chap. v.

5. See S. H. Nasr, Man and Nature, the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, pp. 124-129; S. H. Nasr, "Man in the Universe," in Eternità e storia. I valori permanenti nel divenire storico, Florence, 1970, pp. 182-193; also in S. H. Nasr, Sufi Essays, Chicago (IL), ABC International Group, 1999, Capt. 6.

6. F. Schuon, Logic and Transcendence, trans. P. Townsend, London, Perennial Books, 1984, "The Contradiction of Relativism," pp. 7-18.

7. Usually, three stages of certainty are distinguished, based upon the language of the Quran: "the science of certainty" (*^{c}ilm al-yaqīn*), "the eye of certainty" (*^{c}ayn al-yaqīn*) and the "truth of certainty" (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). These stages have been compared to "hearing a description of fire," "seeing fire," and "being burned by fire." See Abū Bakr Sirāj ed-Dīn, The Book of Certainty, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1992.

8. See J. Servier, L'Homme et l'invisible, Paris, R. Laffont, 1964.

9. See G. Di Santillana and E. von Dechend, Hamlet's Mill, Ipswich, Gambit, 1969. These examples could be multiplied tenfold in many fields, not the least amazing of which are the remarkable alphabets developed by some of the indigenous nations of Africa.

10. See R. Guénon, The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, trans. by Lord Northbourne, Ghent (NY), Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 1995.

11. We have in mind many spiritual masters and their spiritual organizations who have come to the West in the past few decades and sought to increase their following by disseminating exactly the same techniques and methods to Westerners as they were applying in the East, with the result that many people unqualified for initiation have been allowed to practice methods that have been either fruitless or harmful to them and in certain cases have led to insanity. Many authentic *bhakti* masters from India have spread their message to Western disciples as if they were addressing a traditional Hindu audience. The results of such efforts are clear for all to see. In any case, the tree is judged by the fruit it bears. Such cases must, however, be clearly distinguished from the self-proclaimed masters who do not issue from any orthodox traditional background but have the audacity to place themselves "above" traditional teachings and the perennial truths expounded by saints and sages throughout the centuries.

12. The whole group of traditional writers in the Western world, consisting of such men as R. Guénon, A. K. Coomaraswamy, M. Pallis, T. Burckhardt and especially F. Schuon, who occupies a special position among them, belong to this category and for this reason play a role of outstanding importance in the spiritual and religious life of the modern world even if their works have, until recently, been neglected in many circles.

13. Concerning this spiritual station, see S. H. Nasr, Sufi Essays, Chap. 5.

14. "Metaphysical knowledge is one thing; its actualization in the mind quite another. All the knowledge which the brain can hold, even if it is immeasurably rich from a human point of view, is as nothing in the sight of Truth. As for metaphysical knowledge it is like a divine seed in the heart; thoughts are only very faint glimmers from It." F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, p. 9.

15. For the role of "faith" in the realization of the highest metaphysical truths, see F. Schuon, "The Nature and Arguments of Faith,"

in Stations of Wisdom, Bloomington (IN), World Wisdom Books, 1995, p. 43ff.

16. The great Algerian saint of the twentieth century, Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī, often repeated the Sufi saying, "He whose soul melteth not away like snow in the hand of religion, in his hand religion like snow away doth melt" (trans. by M. Lings in his A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973). This dictum is a direct allusion to the need for man's separate existence to melt away in the Truth through the attainment of the virtues, which are the only way in which the Truth can become actualized in the being of man. Despite the emphasis upon this basic feature of all authentic spirituality by masters of old as well as by the leading present-day exponents of traditional doctrines such as F. Schuon and T. Burckhardt, there has now formed a whole group of "traditionalists" in the West who accept the teachings of tradition mentally but who do not find it necessary to practice the disciplines of an authentic Way and to discipline their souls in order to become themselves embodiments of the Truth. It is in their case that the second part of the saying of Shaykh al-ʿAlawī applies, for religion or Truth simply melts away in their hands instead of becoming actualized in their being.

17. As already mentioned (note 7), the Sufis usually distinguish between three degrees of certainty, which cover the major steps of the initiatic process, from the mental knowledge of the sacred, to its vision and finally to its realization in one's being.

In one of his famous aphorisms, Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Iskandarī, using a somewhat different terminology, refers to these fundamental stages in these words:

> The ray of light of spiritual vision (*shuʿaʾ al-baṣīrah*, corresponding to *ʿilm al-yaqīn*) makes you witness His nearness to you. The eye of spiritual vision (*ʿayn al-baṣīrah* corresponding to *ʿayn al-yaqīn*) makes you witness your non-being as due to His Being. The truth of spiritual vision (*ḥaqq al-baṣīrah*, corresponding to *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) makes you witness His Being, not your non-being or your being.

See V. Danner, Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's Sufi Aphorisms, Leiden, Brill, 1973, p. 30, no. 36, containing the English translation of the aphorisms which we have here slightly modified. See also P. Nwyia, *Ibn*

ʿAṭāʾ Allāh et la naissance de la confrérie sādilite, Beirut, Dar-el-Machreq, 1972, pp. 102-103, no. 33, where both the Arabic original and the French translation are given.

18. "In knowledge, reasoning can play no part other than that of being the occasional cause of intellection: intellection will come into play suddenly—not continuously or progressively as soon as the mental operation, which was in its turn conditioned by an intellectual intuition, has the quality which makes of it a pure symbol." Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, p. 13.

19. Thanks to the efforts of T. Burckhardt, there are excellent summaries with precious notes of both these works in French as La Sagesse des prophètes, Paris, Albin Michel, 1955 (trans. into English by A. Culma-Seymour as The Wisdom of the Prophets, Gloucestershire, Beshara Publications, 1975) and De l'homme universel Paris, Dervy-Livres, 1976 (trans. by A. Culme-Seymour as Universal Man, Gloucestershire, Beshara Publications, 1983). Burckhardt has also summarized the doctrinal teachings of the school of Ibn ʿArabī in his An Introduction to Sufism, trans. by D. M. Matheson, Northamptonshire, The Aquarian Press, 1990. In English also there are several partial translations of Sufi doctrinal works, including Studies in Islamic Mysticism, by R. A. Nicholson, Cambridge, The University Press, 1978, which contains a translation of parts of al-Jīlī's *al-Insān al-kāmil*, and several translations by A. J. Arberry of al-Kalābādhī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ and others. What are needed, however, are complete translations into English of these and the many other works of those Sufi masters who have given an open exposition of Sufi doctrine.

The case of Ibn ʿArabī is exceptional for the last few years have witnessed the appearance of many fine translations of his works into French and English. See J. Morris, "Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters," Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 106, 1986, pp. 539-51, 733-56; and vol. 107, 1987, pp. 101-19. See also the two major works of W. Chittick containing a great deal of translation of the master's texts: The Sufi Path of Knowledge, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1989; and his The Self-Disclosure of God, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1998.

20. As far as this school of theosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*), to which we have already alluded above, and its importance for an understanding of Islamic metaphysics are concerned, see S. H. Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, Chap. 2; Nasr, "The School of Isfahan" and "Ṣadr

al-Dīn Shīrāzī" in The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, London, Curzon, 1996, and the many works of H. Corbin, who has devoted a lifetime to making this as yet little studied aspect of Islamic intellectual and spiritual life better known in the West. See especially his En Islam iranien, particularly Vols. 2 and 4. He has also translated one of the major treatises of Mullā Ṣadrā, the *Kitāb al-mashāᶜir*, into French as Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques.

21. See S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chap. iv.

22. Even in Hinduism, however, there is the parabhakti form of spirituality which is gnostic but colored by bhaktic elements. Therefore, by referring to the clear separation between these two forms of spirituality in Hinduism, we did not mean to exclude their synthesis within the Hindu climate.

23. This does not mean to imply that there have never been any hermits or wandering dervishes among Muslims. They can still be found in various parts of the Islamic world today. It means that Islamic spirituality in its main current combines these two modes. Some Sufi orders such as the Shādhiliyyah and the Niᶜmatullāhiyyah in fact insist on their adepts having a definite profession and practicing the contemplative life within active life in society. They prefer the life of the contemplative who lives in society (*mutasabbib*) to the contemplative who is withdrawn from society (*mutajarrid*).

24. Khaḍir, who corresponds to Elias, symbolizes the esoteric function in the story of Khaḍir and Moses in the Quran, and is represented usually as the "green prophet." See A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Khadir and the Fountain of Life, in the "Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art," Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 4, Autumn 1970 pp. 221-230. In Shiᶜite Islam, the Twelfth Imam fulfills a similar function and in Sufism in general the Uwaysīs are a particular order who are said to receive initiation from the "invisible master." See also the numerous studies of L. Massignon on the spiritual significance of Khaḍir, for example, "Elie et son role transhistorique, Khadiriya en Islam," Etudes carmélitaines: Elie le prophète, Paris, 1956, Vol. 2, pp. 269-290.

25. This is a direct reference to the act of initiation through which a disciple becomes attached to a particular master and order.

26. R. A. Nicholson, The *Mathnawī* of *Jalālu'ddin Rūmī*, London, Luzac & Co., 1982, 1926, Vol. 2, pp. 20-21, with a small alteration in the verse "They make a woolen garb," which Nicholson has translated as "They make a woolen lion," basing himself on another version of the

original Persian verse. See also S. H. Nasr, Sufi Essays, p. 61 ff.

27. We have dealt more extensively with this theme in Sufi Essays, p. 63.

28. See S. H. Nasr, Man and Nature, the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, Chap. iii.

CHAPTER 6

THE HARMONY OF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION IN ISLAM

> An hour of meditation is better than sixty years of acts of worship.
>
> Prophetic *ḥadīth*

> Knowledge without action is like a tree without fruit.
>
> Arabic proverb

Having dealt with the role that Sufism can play in fulfilling the spiritual needs of modern man in general, we now turn to a particular aspect of the Islamic tradition, namely the relation between contemplation and action, which concerns so directly the present-day plight of Western man and to which brief reference has already been made in the previous chapter. One of the basic problems of modern man is the divorce between contemplation and action, and in fact the almost complete destruction of the former by the latter, even in religious circles which were always devoted to the contemplative life. This loss of balance between these two primordial modes of human existence is itself another consequence of the loss of the Center and the attempt made by modern man to remain content with the periphery, with disperse action independent of the

vision and message from the Center which alone can prevent human action from becoming meaningless dissipation. It is, therefore, of particular importance, as an instance of bringing the doctrinal and practical teachings of the Islamic tradition to bear upon the existing problems of Western man, to turn to the message of Islam concerning the contemplative and active lives as possibilities for man to follow in his terrestrial journey.

The two quotations at the beginning of this chapter, if interpreted in the light of the question of the relation between contemplation and action, express their just relationship in Islam, a religion which, as already stated, has never allowed the contemplative and active lives to become totally divorced from each other or to be separately institutionalized.[1] For the modern world, which is immersed so completely in a way of acting and doing bound to purely terrestrial ends that it has lost sight of the meaning of contemplation, let alone its primacy over action, it is hardly conceivable that in a civilization such as that of Islam action and contemplation should exist side by side harmoniously and, in fact, complement each other. Today it is difficult to imagine a universe of thought, action and being in which contemplation leads to action, and action on the spiritual plane becomes the way of access to the inner garden of contemplation.

Contemplation in Islamic spirituality, as in other integral traditions, involves essentially a knowledge that relates the knower to higher modes of being. It is identified with *shuhūd* (vision) and *ta'ammul* (literally "to regard attentively") and is related to *tafakkur* (meditation) in traditional Islamic sources. It is referred to constantly in the Quran, which commands man to contemplate the realities of the universe in relation to their divine prototypes. The essentially gnostic character of Islamic spirituality lends a contemplative air to all the authentic manifestations of Islam, including, of course, its sacred art,[2] and causes the soul of the Muslim to tend towards contemplation as that of a Christian tends toward sacrifice.[3] There lies deep within the texture of the soul molded by the message of the Quran a tendency to uproot itself from the world of multiplicity and to establish itself at the center of that "void" which sym-

bolizes Divine Unity and whose reflection is to be found in both virgin nature and in Islamic sacred art. There is the tendency within the soul of the Muslim to be satisfied with the contemplation of a single flower, a blade of wheat, a solitary bush or tree, which, being epiphanies of the Divine, all provide even more than the contemplative eye needs to behold, and all serve as the gateway to the Infinite. For as the Persian poem states,

> If thou dissectest the heart of any atom, thou shalt behold a sun within it.
>
> Hātif of Ispahan

Moreover, in the Islamic context, this contemplation has always been wedded to action understood in its traditional sense. The contemplative form of Islamic spirituality has never been opposed to correct action and has in fact often been combined with an irresistible inner urge to correct action. It is this inner unity that made Islamic civilization at the height of its power one of the most virile and active in human history at the same time that it harbored within itself a most intense contemplative life.

Here again the message of the Quran expresses the rapport between contemplation or knowledge and action, between *al-ᶜilm* and *al-ᶜamal*, which was divinely ordained for the Islamic community. Throughout the Quran the injunction to contemplate God's wisdom in creation as well as in its metacosmic reality is followed by injunctions to act correctly and according to principles derived from that wisdom. The call to daily prayer in its Shiᶜite form, based on formulae drawn from the Quran, serves as a good example of this principle, for it summarizes the hierarchic relationship between God's wisdom, man's knowledge of it and the action which issues from this knowledge. The second part of the call to prayer (*adhān*) consists of three phrases: *ḥayy ᶜalaʾ l-ṣalāh*, hurry to prayer, *ḥayy ᶜalaʾ l-falāḥ*, hurry to salvation, *ḥayy ᶜalaʾ khayr al-ᶜamal*, hurry to the best act, good works or correct action. Prayer, which in its highest form is contemplative and unitive, leads to salvation or deliverance

of the soul from all bondage and imperfection and this in turn leads to correct action. Without prayer or contemplation one cannot be in a state of grace or goodness and without being good one cannot do good. Correct action depends on the correct mode of being, which in turn issues from the correct relation with the source of all existence through prayer, which in its most exalted mode is pure contemplation. How often is this simple truth forgotten in the modern world where men want to do good without being good, to reform the world without reforming themselves, to exalt action and belittle contemplation, unaware that without observance of the above hierarchy no action can ever yield completely fruitful results, especially so far as human welfare in its broadest sense is concerned.

In the light of the innate relationship between contemplation and action contained in the formulae of the *adhān* it can be said that although contemplation and action are complementary, they are not on an equal footing. Contemplation and meditation, which is closely related to it, stand above action, as the *ḥadīth* about an hour of meditation being more worthy than sixty years of acts of worship reveals. At the same time, correct action follows from contemplation and is related to the realized aspect of knowledge which contemplation in fact makes possible. The Arabic saying that knowledge without action is like a tree without fruit can be interpreted to mean precisely that theoretical knowledge is incomplete if it is not actualized through contemplation into realization, which in turn leads to a transformation and, in fact, to the "death and resurrection" of man and thus to the correct mode of action, which issues effortlessly from the newly acquired mode of being. It means that such theoretical knowledge has not fulfilled its proper function. Contemplation alone can turn this theoretical knowledge into concrete realization leading in turn to correct action, which may be inward or outward, depending on the conditions chosen for man by the hand of destiny. It can turn the theoretical metaphysical doctrine, which is like a purifying snow within the mind, into a fire in the center of the heart, a fire which not only melts the heart but also enlivens the limbs and provides them with a new vitality.

The relationship between contemplation and action in

human life thus described is an echo, in the matrices of time and space, of the principial domain, and an image, although in reverse, of the cosmogonic act itself. In the Quran the act of creation, the fiat lux, is expressed in the majestic verse

> But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that he saith unto it: "Be!" and it is.
>
> 36: 82 (Pickthall trans.)

Creation is related to an act which at the same time bestows existence and knows all things in principle. The act of God is at once the Word or Logos (*al-kalimah*) and the Intellect (*al-ᶜaql*). Therefore, not only does God utter the word kun (Be!), but also the spiritual root or dominion (*malakūt*) of all things resides in His presence, as the Quranic verse immediately following the one above confirms:

> Therefore glory be unto Him in Whose hand is the dominion (*malakūt*) over all things! Unto Him ye will be brought back.
>
> 36: 83 (Pickthall trans.)

The Divine Act, therefore, is inextricably related to the Divine contemplation of the essences of things, of their *aᶜyān*, or to use the terminology of the Quranic verse just cited, their *malakūt*, which means at once "dominion" and the higher planes of reality or the spiritual world.[4]

Furthermore, in Sufi metaphysics and cosmology, which are based directly on the Quranic revelation, the creation of the universe is conceived as a "breathing" by God upon the immutable archetypes (*al-aᶜyān al-thābitah*), which are God's knowledge of all things as well as their spiritual essence. The "breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-Raḥmān*) externalizes the Divine possibilities in the form of external realities. The Divine Act creates the cosmos through contemplation, a cosmos which itself is the result of God's contemplation of Himself. For it was in order to contemplate His own Beauty that God created the universe.[5]

Likewise, according to the Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā, the very substance of the universe is the result of God's contemplation of Himself. By contemplating Himself, the

Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) causes to exist the First Intellect, and the First Intellect in turn the Second Intellect, down to the world of generation and corruption in which man resides.[6] Contemplation and existence, knowledge and being, are interrelated, and on the highest plane God's act and self-knowledge are ultimately the same.

In the process of spiritual realization, which is in a way the reversal of the cosmogonic act, namely a journey by means of the ascending arc (*al-qaws al-ṣuᶜūdī*) through all the degrees that have been brought into being by the cosmogonic act in the stages of the descending arc (*al-qaws al-nuzūlī*) of cosmic manifestation, contemplation and action are once again interrelated. Contemplation leads to correct action, and action, conceived as inner spiritual travail as well as external acts which put the soul in the right state to undergo the inner alchemy, leads to the doors of contemplation. But because man must know in order to act, contemplation, as already stated, always precedes action in a principial manner. Thus the contemplative man is held in higher esteem in traditional Islamic society than the man of action, as the famous *ḥadīth* testifies:

> The ink of the man of knowledge is more worthy than the blood of the martyr.

Yet precisely because there is no monasticism in Islam; because Islam is a society of "married monks";[7] because the Divine Law of Islam (the *Sharīᶜah*) is at once a code of action and a way of preparing the soul for the flights of contemplation in the spiritual world, and because of many other factors, the ink and the blood have never been totally divorced, and the Islamic order has preserved a remarkable balance between the contemplative and the active lives, a balance which cannot be fully understood by a merely theoretical discussion of the subject from the outside. As long as man does not participate in tradition in an operative manner and does not benefit from the grace or barakah issuing from its rites and other sacred forms, the complementarily of the contemplative and the active lives is

most difficult to conceive. It happens often in the Western world today that both contemplation and action are thought about abstractly and categorized logically, but except for isolated cases rarely are they lived and practiced correctly, with the result that their inner complementarity is not usually appreciated or understood. How often in the modern world does one hear from men who have only a theoretical knowledge of tradition without actual participation in it, that such and such a way of life corresponds to the way of action and such and such another to contemplation; that one must do such a thing according to one particular traditional source and contemplate in such a way according to another, as if one were collecting art pieces from various parts of the world for a museum exhibition. Yet, although all authentic traditional sources speak with authority, they cannot be understood by a simply theoretical grasp of the teachings they contain nor can selections be made from their teachings by men who do not follow one tradition themselves and who in being selective ultimately place their own selves as the judge of God-given traditions.

So many modern men, therefore, who rely only on books and simply speak about tradition without practicing it, are never able to perform correct action in the spiritual sense, not to speak of reaching states of contemplation which in their pure form, alone possessing spiritual efficacy, belong only to the traditional universe. The man who does not practice a spiritual way cannot experience that inner certitude, that inner attachment of one's being to the Divinity, which makes of action an application of immutable principles[8] and the gateway to the world of contemplation, which brings about a state of unity wherein contemplation and action are wedded in an indissoluble union.[9] In fact, what is invocation (*dhikr*), that central practice of Sufism, but such a wedding between action and contemplation at their highest level? There is an immeasurable difference between the man who does not practice a tradition and does not live "existentially" attached to a traditional world and one who participates in such a world, especially if he be one whose participation is active, if he be one who lives in the

awareness of being motivated and moved at every moment of life by the "Hand" of God according to the Quranic verse:

> The Hand of Allah is above their hands.
>
> 48:10

As the Alexandrian Sufi Ibn ᶜAṭāᵓallāh al-Iskandarī; states:

> He who is negligent awakens in the morning by considering what he is going to do,
>
> And he who is wise by considering what God will do with him.[10]

There is an immense difference between the two, even in the context of the traditional world. How much greater is the difference in a world such as the modern one in which many men live in a state of total amnesia or at best a simply theoretical and cerebral understanding of tradition, a state which hides from them the possibilities of practicing the traditional life in an active way and of opening inner doors to the world of contemplation amidst external circumstances and situations which, seen only from the outside, appear opposed to such possibilities and incongruent with the spiritual life.[11]

When we turn to the actual possibilities of practicing the contemplative life within the Islamic tradition, we are faced at first sight with a situation which seems to leave out the possibility of a contemplative life, if this form of life is identified with one form or another of monasticism, as one sees in Christianity or Buddhism. Monasticism is banned according to the famous dictum, "There is no monasticism in Islam," but this institutional ban does not by any means imply the closing of the door to the life of contemplation. On the contrary, Islamic spirituality, being gnostic in nature, is based directly on contemplation and, as stated above, there is in the Muslim soul a tendency toward contemplation which is combined with combativeness (*jihād*), understood in its esoteric sense of removing all the obstacles which veil the Truth and make It inaccessible.[12] As we have seen in the previous chapter, Sufism, the main mani-

estation of Islamic esoterism, contains within itself the possibility of the most intense contemplative life, not because it is a monachisme érrant as some orientalists have called it,[13] but because such a perspective lies by nature within the Islamic revelation and constitutes its essence.

The unitary principle of Islam, however, could not permit this contemplative way to become crystallized as a separate social organization outside the matrix molded by the injunctions of the Divine Law or *Sharīᶜah*. It had to remain as an inner dimension of that Law and institutionally as an organization integrated into the Islamic social pattern and inseparable from it.[14] As a result, contemplatives of the highest order have often combined their life of contemplation with the most intense forms of activity, and throughout Islamic history outstanding Sufis have been known to be scholars, artists, teachers and even administrators and rulers. In such cases, the inner contemplative life has intensified and given meaning to their acts rather than in any way diminishing their efficiency or appropriateness.

In the case of women, people with a Christian background familiar with the distinction between Mary and Martha, and aware of the figures of such outstanding Christian women contemplatives and saints as Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Sienna, often find it difficult to understand how the possibility of the contemplative life could exist for a woman in Islam. Putting aside certain female ascetics such as Rābiᶜah, who is one among many female saints and mystics in Islam, most contemplative Muslim women have, like men, found the possibility of the contemplative life within the matrix of the Muslim social order itself. To accept one's destiny as the wife and mother who is of necessity concerned with daily problems, and to submit oneself to one's social position and duties with the awareness that this is in reality submitting oneself to the Divine Will have led many Muslim women to an intensely contemplative inner life amidst, and integrated into, the type of active life imposed upon them by the hands of destiny. The Muslim woman's acceptance of her role and duty as specified by

Islamic teachings echoes the state of spiritual poverty or *faqr* and even of *fanā'*, or "annihilation," in God, and can lead, when combined with true piety and devotion to spiritual practices, to these states. For both men and women in Islam, the contemplative life lies not outside but within the active norms of life specified by the *Sharī'ah*, exceptional cases and circumstances as willed by God being, of course, always possible.

The most essential rapport between contemplation and action in Islam is to found in prayer, especially in quintessential prayer or invocation (*dhikr*) practiced by the Sufis. Therein contemplation and action become unified. Perfect action, which is the *dhikr*, leads to contemplation (*shuhūd* or *mushāhadah*), while contemplation is itself the *dhikr* inasmuch as the *dhikr* is unified with "Him who is invoked" (*madhkūr*). In perfect invocation, he who invokes or performs the act of invocation (*dhākir*) becomes united with the *dhikr* and the *madhkūr* in a supreme union which transcends the dichotomy between action and contemplation, knowledge and existence, the knower and the known, and in which all polarities are embraced within the essential and at the same time primordial Unity.[15]

One can, moreover, distinguish in the *dhikr*, or unitive prayer, a contemplative action and an active contemplation. The incantatory methods of Sufism, if practiced under the direction of a master and within the protective matrix of traditional orthodoxy, are all forms of contemplative action at the highest level, leading ultimately to "union" with God. Inasmuch as the process of realization is, as already asserted, in a sense the reversal of the cosmogonic act, the traversing of the ascending arc (*al-qaws al-ṣu'ūdī*) on the path of return to the Source and Origin by means of the contemplative act results in going from a state in which knowledge and existence are separated to a state in which they are united. As a result, in a mysterious fashion the agent who performs the contemplative act is able to transcend his own limited existence as agent through his very action. The secret of this paradox lies in the fact that in the dhikr man performs an act, but an act that is preceded by contemplation, an act which is also a state of being, an act which is ultimately not the act of man but the act of God. Hence, in the

same way that through the Word God created the world, again through His Word—the *dhikr*, which is mysteriously the act of man participating in the eternal and immutable act of God—creation ascends in the scale of being and finally returns to its Source. Quintessential prayer is a contemplative act which leads to pure contemplation and finally "union."

As for active contemplation, it too is nothing but the *dhikr* seen from another point of view. Sufism is not a passive form of mysticism. It is a journey (*sulūk*) in search of Divine Knowledge, the attainment of which leads to union and to the overcoming of the separation between man in his fallen state and man as the Universal and Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), who is in eternal "union" with God because he is the perfect mirror in whom the Divine Names and Qualities are reflected.[16] There is, then, in the very method of Sufism or the *dhikr*, as it is combined with various forms of meditation (*fikr*), an active contemplation of the spiritual realities. For those who actually tread the path, the *sālikūn*, in contrast to the stationary members of Sufi orders who remain satisfied with being simply blessed with the grace of initiation (the *mutabarrikūn*), the whole of the spiritual work is continuously combined with the element of active contemplation in which progress upon the spiritual path is achieved through an active participation of the whole being of the adept.

All this explains why, in Islam, one of the symbols of the Universal Man, who embodies the full realization of the truth and in whom the *dhikr* has become fully operative, is the Seal of Solomon. The triangle with its base toward heaven symbolizes contemplation, and the other, in the reverse position, symbolizes action.[17] It is this perfect harmony and wedding between the two that makes the act of the contemplative at once the sword that discriminates between truth and error and establishes harmony and justice, and the brush that paints upon the canvas of time and space the beauty of the spiritual world and opens thereby the gate for the return to that world through the very contemplation of the forms of beauty thus created.

The relationship between action and contemplation

described on its most essential level as quintessential orison is reflected also on the plane of the study of nature and of the creation of art. Islamic science certainly enabled man to gain knowledge of nature and also to act upon nature, as we see in agriculture, medicine and the like. But the final goal of this science was to enable man to contemplate nature and to aid him to act upon himself and to remake himself with the help of the contemplative knowledge thus gained. Islamic science was concerned with a process which also implied the possibility for nature, considered as the theophany (*tajallī*), to act upon the soul of man, as well as the possibility for men to "act" upon nature through the contemplation of its epiphanies.[18] Islamic science thus began with an objectivization of nature which made it an "object" of study to achieve a unitive knowledge which finally integrated man with his own prototype as well as with the prototype of nature, so that nature became a "thou," an intimate witness to the Divine Presence. Moreover, action upon nature has always been regulated and kept within limits in the Islamic perspective because the traditional Muslim knows fully that ultimate happiness comes not from endless action turned outward toward the plundering and devastating of nature but from acting inwardly upon oneself to tame one's own lower nature and to "Islamize the Satan of one's own being," as the Sufis would say.

In direct contrast to this perspective, modern science, which is marked by the complete lack of a contemplative dimension, has sought since the seventeenth century to drive a wedge between man and nature by extending further and further "the edge of objectivity,"[19] with the result that this "objectivity" has finally led to the total alienation of man from his natural environment, an alienation which, combined with a theory of action as an aggressive externalization of human energy with the aim of indiscriminately raping and plundering nature, has led the world to its present environmental crisis. The relation between contemplation and action in the Islamic sciences of nature, which is derived from the principial relation already delineated, contains a message of the utmost importance for modern man

in search of a means to save himself from the catastrophe brought about by his own folly.

Likewise, in Islamic art there is an intimate relation between action and contemplation which recaptures in the world of forms the complementarity existing between the two in the principial order.[20] The artist obviously makes something: that is, he acts in one way or another upon matter. But because he follows traditional patterns, norms, regulations and procedures which are themselves derived from and are the fruit of contemplative vision, his action is subsequent to contemplation and follows in its wake. In the case of many a traditional artist who is himself engaged in spiritual practice, the phase of making or acting is based upon the direct fruit of his own contemplation as well as the fruit of contemplation of previous masters handed down to him through traditional channels. As a result, the various manifestations of Islamic art themselves serve as an aid to contemplation. Whether it be the courtyard of a mosque, an arabesque design, a verse of Sufi poetry or a traditional musical composition, various forms of Islamic art serve the function of strengthening the wings of the soul for its contemplative flight into the heavenly empyrean. Their beautiful forms are, in fact, so many reminiscences of the beauty of paradise which man can taste even here on earth on the wings of contemplation and spiritual vision. They are beautiful forms which do not externalize the soul but draw it to its own Center. In Islamic art, as in the Islamic sciences of nature, contemplation and action are intertwined and complementary, while the hierarchic relation according to which contemplation precedes action is always preserved. The relation seen in these domains is, moreover, nothing other than the application to these fields of the principial relation existing between them in the spiritual life, one which is so basic and fundamental that it can be seen in every authentic manifestation of Islam itself and also of its arts and sciences.

As far as the operative and practical aspects of man's spiritual life are concerned, the perfect and exemplary relation between contemplation and action is to be found for every

Muslim in the life of the Blessed Prophet, who is of necessity the model for every form of spiritual life in Islam. If there are those who, as a result of the influence of modernism, seek to belittle the importance of the contemplative life in Islam, they need only study the life of the Prophet both before the commencement of his prophetic mission and during the twenty-three years when he lived on earth as a prophet. In both periods, he was devoted intensely to contemplation and spent much time in solitude, while at the same time he transformed human history through a series of actions of such far-reaching consequences that they cannot be gauged in ordinary human terms and are beyond the ken of imagination. Likewise, if there are those who wish to overemphasize the importance of external action and to extol action pure and simple as an end in itself, again they need only study the actions of the Prophet, which were always the applications of principles rooted in contemplation and derived from knowledge of the Divine Order.

Of course, no one has the right to claim or to hope to achieve the perfection of a prophet, but the very harmony between contemplation and action, between a heart that was always at peace in the Divine Presence and a mind and body that acted with the utmost determination combined with resignation to the Divine Will—as seen in the exemplary life of the Prophet of Islam—is the perfect embodiment of the ideal relationship and the complementarity between contemplation and action for Muslims. The Prophet thus remains the perfect model (uswah) to follow, and in him is to be seen, in a blinding fashion, perfect contemplative action and active contemplation, and the union of action and contemplation in that coincidentia oppositorum which transcends all duality and opposition. The end of human life according to Islam is to act according to the Divine Will and finally to reach, through self-purification, such a state of knowledge and vision or contemplation as to see God everywhere. The Prophet was that perfect being who acted according to the Divine Will at every moment of his life, his gaze fixed on the Divine realities, contemplating God both beyond manifestation and in every speck of His creation. In the Prophet is thus to be

found the perfect manifestation of the complementarity of contemplation and action which lies at the heart of the Islamic way of life and which characterizes, at its highest level of meaning, the central method of realization in Islamic spirituality. His example not only remains supreme for Muslims but is also of the utmost importance for those in the modern world in search of harmonizing once again the contemplative and the active lives and bringing unity to the life of man, whose total submersion in multiplicity and surrender to dispersive action has already drained his life of spiritual quality and meaning and threatens even to destroy the just equilibrium between the soul and the body upon which all human life depends and without which the essential human nature of man becomes devoured by his accidental animality.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. This does not mean that the contemplative life in its institutionalized form as it exists in other traditions should be disdained, as it is by so many modernized Muslims. The Prophet himself had a special love for Christian monks. In any case, the contemplative life is an absolutely necessary part of any integral tradition, and the form it takes within that tradition depends completely on what God has ordained. Muslims today, who profess to have faith in God and His Providence, should therefore be the last to criticize the presence of contemplative ways of living in other traditions which happen to differ in their formal structure from what is to be found in Islam. It is a total misunderstanding of religion in general and of Islam in particular on the part of modernists to claim superiority for Islam over other religions because Islam does not permit man to pursue the contemplative life in a distinct form. But this is precisely what some Muslim modernists, eager to placate the shallow criticisms of modern Westerners, have claimed, forgetting the numerous *ḥadīth* of the Blessed Prophet on the supremacy of contemplation over action.

Concerning the necessity of the contemplative life in traditions where it takes a monastic form,, see F. Schuon, "The Universality of Monasticism and its Relevance in the Modern World," in Light on the Ancient Worlds, pp. 119-135.

2. See T. Burckhardt, "The Foundations of Islamic Art," in his Sacred Art in East and West, trans. by Lord Northbourne, Bedfont, Middlesex, Perennial Books, 1967; and his "Perennial Values in Islamic Art," in his Mirror of the Intellect, pp. 219-230.

3. See F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, pp. 18-19.

4. In traditional Islamic cosmology, *malakūt* (the angelic domain) is used to refer to a state of being, or "Divine Presence" (*ḥaḍrah*) standing below the archangelic world or the *jabarūt* (the domain of power), and above the physical world, or the *mulk*, but in the Quranic verse just cited it refers, according to many of the traditional commentators to the spiritual root of things which is at once their essence and the highest level of their being residing "in the hands of God." See F. Schuon, Dimensions of Islam, Chap. II; and S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, pp. 92ff.

5. See Ibn ᶜArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. by A. Afifi, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-ᶜarabī, 1966. Chap. I, where this doctrine is fully expounded. See also Ibn ᶜArabī's The Wisdom of the Prophets, trans. by T. Burckhart, trans. from French by A. Culme-Seymour, 1975, pp. 8ff; T.

Burckhardt, An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine, pp. 64-72;; T. Izutsu, A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism, Part One, Chaps. xi, xii and xiii; and S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, Chap. xiii. See also W. Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, where Ibn ᶜArabī's cosmology is amply treated.

6. Concerning Ibn Sīnā's ontology and cosmology, see S. H. Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Chaps. 12, 13 and 14.

7. This is an expression of F. Schuon. Concerning this aspect of Islamic society and family, see his The Transcendent Unity of Religions, Chap. Vll.

8. See Marco Pallis,, "The Active Life," in his The Way and the Mountain, London 1960, pp. 36-61.

9. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are of course rare exceptions, called the *afrād* in Sufism, who are "given" certain spiritual experiences by Heaven without their systematically practicing a regular spiritual way. But this is only the exception which proves the rule and is in any case not a choice open to man. Such exceptions are certainly no excuse for those who refuse seriously to practice a tradition and yet seek enlightenment.

10. P. Nwyia, *Ibn ᶜAṭāᵓillāh et la naissance de la confrérie sādilite*, no. 106. See also V. Danner, Ibn ᶜAṭāᵓillāh's Sufi Aphorisms, p. 40, no. 114, where a somewhat different translation is given of the same aphorism.

11. Many people with a contemplative tendency who seek to follow a traditional way in the modern world have refused to accept Islam in general and Sufism in particular because of their external judgment about the incompatibility of the demands that Islam makes on life on the plane of action with conditions imposed by the modern world and also because of what appears as an insurmountable chasm that separates the lives of Sufi saints and contemplatives as recorded in traditional sources from what can be practiced and lived in the modern world. Such people neglect certain forms of cosmic compensation as well as the effect of the *barakah* that issues from traditional forms and practices and the qualitative aspects of action of a traditional nature before the eyes of God. These are all elements which paradoxically make more accessible things which in more normal circumstances were in themselves very difficult to attain. These elements open doors to the world of contemplation through graces which can never be calculated externally by a simply theoretical study of tradi-

tion and the relation between action and contemplation as recorded in traditional sources.

12. "The genesis of a religion amounts to the creation of a relatively new moral and spiritual type; in Islam, this type consists in the equilibrium—paradoxical from the Christian point of view—between contemplativeness and combativeness, and then between holy poverty and hallowed sexuality. The Arab—and the man Arabized by Islam—has, so to speak, four poles, namely the desert, the sword, woman and religion. For the contemplative, the four poles become inward: the desert, the sword and woman become so many states or functions of the soul." F. Schuon, Christianity/Islam-Essays on Esoteric Eumericism, trans. by G. Polit, Bloomington (IN), World Wisdom Books, 1985, p. 181.

13. See, for example, R. Brunel, Le Monachisme érrant dans l'Islam, Paris, Librairie Larose, 1955.

14. Concerning the relationship of Sufism to the *Sharīᶜah*, see F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, Chap. iv, pp. 106 ff. Schuon, *"Īmān, Islām, Iḥsān,"* in his L'Oeil du coeur, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, pp. 150-156; and S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, pp. 121-144.

15. Regarding this unity, the Sufi poet Jāmī says:

How fortunate art thou to have thy heart filled with the light of the invocation,
In its light Thy carnal soul has become conquered.
The thought of multiplicity has passed away,
The invoker has become the invocation and the invocation the invoked.

See F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, pp. 122 ff., where the Sufi doctrine of dhikr is expounded majestically.

16. Union (*wiṣāl*) in Sufism does not mean the union of man's imperfect nature with God. This would be sheer blasphemy. As the Sufi poem says:

"How can this creature of dust be related to the world of purity?"

Rather, union means the realization of one's nothingness, the quality of perfect servitude (*ᶜubūdiyyah*) before the Absolute and becoming a mirror, through this very realization, of God's Names and Qualities. See Ibn ᶜArabī, The Wisdom of the Prophets, pp. 20ff, 1956; and F. Schuon, "The Servant and Union," Dimensions of Islam, pp. 46-53.

17. The two triangles obviously also symbolize activity and passivity as well as Divine and human nature and their union. For an explanation of this symbol, see Abū Bakr Sirāj ed-Dīn, The Book of Certainty, Chap. I.

18. On this aspect of Islamic science, see S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, Chicago, ABC International, 2001, Chap. 19; and Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, Introduction and Chap. 13.

19. To quote C. Gillespie in his well-known study, The Edge of Objectivity, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

20. See the numerous works of T. Burckhardt on this question, such as the works already cited in note 2.

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Part IV

The Contemporary Muslim between Islam and the Modern World

CHAPTER 7
ISLAM IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD TODAY

For nearly all of its fourteen centuries of history Islam filled the whole of the "living space" of that part of the cosmos called the Islamic world, leaving no vacuum to be filled by elements which could properly be called un-Islamic. The earthly manifestation of Islam was practically synonymous with the Islamic world, and everything in the Islamic world from the method of plowing fields to composing poetry was inseparable from the spirit and form of Islam. It is only now, when, as a result of the encroachment of modernism, the homogeneity created by the *Sharīᶜah* on one level and Islamic art on the other has been partially destroyed, that it is possible to speak of Islam in the Islamic world as distinct from other elements of a completely non-Islamic and even anti-Islamic nature which have crept into this world to destroy in part its marvellous unity and homogeneity. It is true that in the traditional world of Islam there were also occasional forms of decadence in both art and thought of the type characteristic of the European Renaissance, but they were so peripheral and so much on the fringe and were, moreover, overwhelmed so rapidly by the spiritual presence of the tradition that they cannot in any way be compared in dimension with the spread of modernism in the Islamic world today.[1] No matter how much effort certain Orientalists spend in seeking to resuscitate the rationalistic tendencies of an Ibn al-Rāwandī, Muhammad ibn Zakariyyāᵓ al-Rāzī, or Ibn Rushd or to display in art exhibitions certain naturalistic vases, frescoes and paintings of Umayyad,

Ottoman, Mogul or Persian origin, they cannot hide the overwhelming evidence of the presence of the spiritual character of the Islamic tradition, a presence which obliterated all such transient phenomena in the Islamic world.

The unity of the Islamic world, however, is now partially broken as never before, not only politically—which had occurred already during the Abbasid period—but even religiously and culturally, by the erosion caused by Westernization, a process which in addition to introducing a totally foreign element into the Islamic world also reflects directly an alien world which itself suffers from the most glaring forms of disunity and contradiction. Numerous works have been written in the West with various degrees of success on modern movements in the Islamic world,[2] but few have considered the effect of the inner contradictions and tensions of Western civilization itself upon the confusion caused in the Islamic world by present-day modernizing elements. It is enough to see the difference of perspective and approach existing today among philosophers, sociologists and educators of Muslim universities, reflecting the centers of learning in which they were trained in continental Europe or England or America, to realize how complicated the pattern of Westernization—which of course has been synonymous with modernization until now— actually is.[3]

In addition to the historical accidents of colonization and Westernization, there is also another factor to consider which reflects the multifarious tendencies within Western civilization itself. Because the Islamic world has always been a unity, it has until now functioned as an organism in which each part has played a particular role. During the classical period of Islamic civilization, each part of the Islamic world was especially known for its mastery of a particular art or science, from sword-making to navigation, from astronomy to *Kalām*. On a more inward level, each of the Islamic peoples, such as the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers and Black Africans, emphasized a particular interpretation of the teachings of Islam and even a particular interpretation of the *Sharī*^{c}*ah*, while the *Sharī*^{c}*ite* rites as well as the pure metaphysics of *Taṣawwuf* and the tech-

niques for its realization provided the thread of unity through this diversity.

The spread of modernism has had the effect not only of sowing the seed of confusion in the minds of those who are affected by it and therefore loosening the hold of Islam upon them, but also of separating different parts of the Islamic world from each other more than ever before. There is much talk of easy communication today, but as a matter of fact, intellectually and culturally, there is less communication between various parts of the Islamic world today not only than during the period of the classical caliphate but even than after the Mongol invasion, when Moroccans worked along with Syrian astronomers in Maraghah under the leadership of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.[4] The various parts of the Islamic world, which for centuries complemented each other and functioned organically and harmoniously, are now left to themselves to recreate a totality from something which was always part of a greater whole and was continuously enriched by other parts of the whole.[5]

As a result, when one studies the situation of Islam and Islamic culture in the Islamic world today, one sees a certain element of this totality better preserved in one land and another element in another land. In one part of *dār al-islām*, certain parts of the *Sharīᶜah* are performed impeccably and certain other parts relatively neglected.[6] In one place the juridical sciences are still studied and taught in their fullness, and in another the theological ones or certain other traditional sciences. Some of the Muslim peoples have preserved the formal aspects of the *Sharīᶜah* more strictly, and others place more emphasis upon their inner content and are less observant concerning the exactness of the outward forms. Likewise, in the domain of the sacred art of Islam, some have preserved the most beautiful Quranic psalmody, others calligraphy and yet others architecture.[7] Some continue to preserve the traditional dress but are more modernized in their minds and attitudes than others who have been forced to abandon their traditional dress but whose psyche and mind remain less affected by modernism.

Many historical factors, ethnic characteristics, internal

social and political elements and the like have created a pattern in which, overlying the deeper layer which unifies the Islamic peoples and displays the unity and totality of Islam, one can observe a differentiated patchwork of modern ways of thinking and acting throughout various Islamic countries, reflecting both the confusion of the Western world and the complicated processes through which this confusion reached the Islamic world. In the periods when Islamic civilization was at its height, when its homogeneity reflected the verities of Islam on all levels of human life, a perceptive Muslim could gain a vision of the totality of the Islamic order through contact with any of its great centers; but today, such an experience of Islam in its totality is not easy to come by, even for a Muslim acquainted with only a part of *dār al-islām*, not to speak of an outsider. For example, in the intellectual field, a person possessing the necessary intellectual and spiritual capabilities and living in Cairo or Damascus or Isfahan of the fourth/eleventh century, or even of the eleventh/seventeenth century, would have been able to gain knowledge through traditional education of the hierarchy of the Islamic sciences extending from the supreme scientia sacra contained in Sufism to various traditional schools of philosophy and the natural sciences to theology and the various juridical sciences. Although not impossible today, the task of attaining such a knowledge is certainly much more difficult than before for a Muslim brought up in a traditional *madrasah*, not to speak of one whose Westernized education has cut him off from many of the essentials of his own intellectual heritage. In fact, the spread of modernism in the Islamic world was facilitated precisely by this diminution in the knowledge of Islam's totality on the part of many Muslims. Yet it is precisely this total knowledge, not limited to a single level but embracing the whole, that is necessary if an intelligentsia capable of answering all the challenges that the Western world poses for Islam is to be formed.

Strangely enough, one of the results of the shock received by certain Muslims in their encounter with the Western world has been a reawakening of interest in the totality of Islam. In these

cases, a "rediscovery" of Islam, and even a kind of renewal of some people's vision of their own faith, has taken place, in such a way that such persons could, in a sense, be called *jadīd al-islām*, (having just become Muslim) with all the positive qualities connected traditionally with this term. The impact of modernism upon the Islamic world, combined with a certain amount of decadence which set in in some domains of life and thought beginning in the twelfth/eighteenth century, destroyed the homogeneity of that world and veiled the totality of the tradition even from Muslims. To understand the nature of the impact of modernism the Islamic world, and to prepare to combat its evils, requires on the part of the Muslim intelligensia a rediscovery of the vision of the whole of their tradition and a stepping outside the boundary of their national and local experience to view the encounter of Islam and modernism in other parts of the Islamic world. For them as well as for the student studying Islam from the outside,[8] the study of the parts cannot but help them to gain a knowledge of the whole.

It must be added, however, that the emphasis laid upon the necessity of studying Islam in each part of the Islamic world today in its confrontation with various forms of modernism must not lead to negligence of the traditional and unchanging aspects of Islamic life so often forgotten in the studies made by Western students as well as by modernistic Muslims. We have had occasion to mention in our previous writings on Islam[9] the danger of the type of method used by most modern students of Islam grounded in such pseudo-sciences as modern sociology and the like or paralyzed by the historicism which grew out of nineteenth century European philosophy. But it is necessary to repeat here that for a mentality trained to measure and to consider as significant only that which changes, the only noteworthy phenomenon in any part of the Islamic world becomes that which is related to some kind of rebellion against the existing traditional order. If there are a dozen traditional commentaries written upon the Quran, they are considered as mere repetitions, but if there is one which breaks with the traditional canons, it is immediately hailed as a significant departure and

made known through articles in various European languages. One can hardly emphasize enough how diabolical this propaganda on behalf of perverted tendencies or trivial mental exercises has been and how on the one hand it has led the Western reader to the wrong conclusion about the contemporary state of Islam, and on the other hand it has misled the Muslim in whom the power of faith (*īmān*) has become weakened by the illusion that traditional Islam is something that belongs only to the past and that by identifying himself with modernistic theories and interpretations he is allying himself with forces that must of necessity prevail in the future.

In reality nothing could be further from the truth. Despite serious encroachments upon the body of Islam by modernism and by the confusion caused within the mind and soul of certain Muslims caught between the pull of their tradition and Western ideologies and values, Islam remains very much a living tradition on both the exoteric and the esoteric levels. Were this not so, it would hardly be possible to speak of applying the teachings of Islam to the problems faced by modern man. If nothing had been left of Islam save some kind of sentimental or apologetic modern interpretation, one could hardly expect it to provide an antidote for the maladies caused by modernism itself. But authentic and traditional Islam continues to live. It is there to be studied and rediscovered in its totality by turning both to the oral and written sources of the tradition as it has been lived and transmitted since its revelation, and to its present-day manifestations in the souls and lives of the Muslim peoples in various parts of the Islamic world under the different historical, political and social conditions imposed upon the once unified *dār al-islām* during the most recent period of Islamic history. Being more acquainted with the Arab and the Persian worlds, it is to these parts of the Islamic world that we turn in seeking to understand something of the state of Islam in the Islamic world in modern times and in its confrontation with modernism. These countries form only a part of the Islamic world, but they continue to be of great importance and centrality because of the fundamental role they have played as the heart of *dār al-islām* since the foundation of Islamic civilization.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. It is worthy of note that the emphasis of European Orientalism on certain fringe phenomena in traditional Islamic society has played no small role in the spread of modernism in the Islamic world itself since the late nineteenth century.

2. Of these the most noteworthy among earlier works are still those of H. A. R. Gibb and W. C. Smith already cited. For a bibliography on the subject, see C. Adams, A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions, New York, Free Press, 1977. As for more recent works see J. O. Voll, Islam—Continuity and Change in the Modern World, Syracuse University Press, 1994, and its valuable bibliography; also J. Esposito, Islam—The Straight Path, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991; J. Esposito (ed.), Voices of Resurgent Islam, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983; S. H. Nasr, Traditional Islam in the Modern World, London, KPI, 1989.

3. See S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, Chap. 12 where this question is discussed for the field of philosophy.

4. It is typical of the state of this lack of communication between various parts of the Islamic world that until recent satellite communication was installed it was easier to speak by telephone from almost any Muslim capital to London or Paris than to another Muslim capital. In fact in some cases one cannot speak with the capital of a neighboring country save through some European capital such as Paris or London.

5. We remember once having read in one of the treatises of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān that there are certain doors for which God has made one lock with two keys, giving one key to the Arabs and the other to the Persians, the two main ethnic groups who created classical Islamic civilization. Jābir adds that a day will come when the two races will separate and neither will be able to open those doors alone. One wonders how many doors remain closed today not only because of the "separation" of the Arabs and the Persians but also of the Arabs and the Turks, the Turks and the Persians, the Persians and the Muslims of the Subcontinent, etcetera.

6. This does not of course apply to the basic "pillars" of Islam, which are observed by all practicing Muslims everywhere, but to such aspects of the Sunnah as forms of *duᶜā*, sacrifice of animals, pilgrimage to various holy sites, supererogatory prayers, chanting of litanies and the like.

7. It seems that the Divine Mercy (*Raḥmah*) would exclude the

possibility that all the traditional channels for the transmission of grace through forms belonging to sacred art could become closed in a particular Islamic milieu, even if this milieu be modernized.

It is thus that in certain Muslim cities debased by the ugliest modern architecture one suddenly hears the most beautiful chanting of the Noble Quran or sees striking examples of calligraphy or other sacred art forms which continue to be the channel for the emanation of the *barakah* of Islam.

8. In fact, if the various prejudices and misunderstandings of many Western Orientalists be put aside, it becomes obvious that in their insistence upon studying Islamic civilization as a whole and in basing their studies on the Islamic world itself rather than on parochial divisions, they have rendered a service to serious students of Islam. Many young Muslim intellectuals have regained a vision of the totality of Islam and its civilization through contact with Western studies on Islam, which, because they have approached the subject from the outside, have tried to look upon the whole of Islamic civilization rather than its parts. This merit does not, of course, in any way condone the wilful or unintentional misrepresentations of Islam by many Orientalists whose works have played no small role in wreaking intellectual havoc among many modernized Muslims, especially in countries where a European language is prevalent. See M. Jameelah, Islam and Orientalism, Lahore, Mohammad Yusuf Khan & Sons, 1981, where the views of several well-known Islamicists are criticized from the orthodox *Sharī*^{c}*ite* point of view.

9. See, especially, S. H. Nasr, "The Immutable Principles of Islam and Western Education," Muslim World, Jan. 1966, pp. 4-9; and Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam.

CHAPTER 8
ISLAM IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE 14TH ISLAMIC CENTURY

The Arabs were chosen by God as the recipients and the first propagators of the Islamic revelation, and since the inception of Islamic civilization their destiny has remained indissolubly bound with the earthly manifestations of Islam wherever these might be. The vast majority of Arabs are Muslims,[1] and even the few among the Muslim Arabs who have recently rebelled against the faith are nevertheless influenced in many ways by Islam's norms and spirit. Their psychic and mental makeup has been molded and structured for too long by Islam to enable them to eradicate its influence overnight. In the lives of the vast majority of Arabs who consciously practice Islam and accept its teachings, and even of the few who have wandered away from its sacred mould, Islam remains the overwhelming reality, penetrating even now into practically every aspect of their individual and collective existence.

But despite this indissoluble bond between Islam and the Arabs, events of the past two centuries have caused the penetration of many foreign ideas, ranging from nationalism and secularism to socialism, Marxism and liberalism into the traditional universe of the Arabs, and have brought about some modifications in the understanding of the traditional pattern of religion among certain classes. These factors must, of course, be evaluated and considered in any appraisal of the situation of Islam in the Arab world during the last century, for they form the background of the complex and often bewildering scene

observable during the fourteenth Islamic century and also today.

The first element to consider in studying present-day religious life among the Arabs is the shock received by all Muslims, and especially the Arabs, during the nineteenth century, from the domination of the European powers, a domination which for Muslims posed a crisis of cosmic dimensions. For the first time in their history, except for the short episode of the Mongol invasion and events in Spain and the northern Caucasian region which were in the periphery of *dār al-islām*, Muslims experienced continued political humiliation at the hands of non-Muslims. The very promise of the Noble Quran to give Muslims victory in the world provided they remained faithful to Islam seemed to have become negated by the experience of history itself. This shock, at once political, social and religious, was the source of a series of reactions of differing natures, ranging from the "reform" movements, which sought to "purify" Islam, to various forms of Mahdiism, which saw in the corruption of the times a confirmation of the teachings of the Quran about the latter days, and to out-and-out modernism and secularism, which, however, did not gain any notable followers until the twentieth century.

The unitary nature of Islam, combined with the nature of the political shock received from Western domination, has made political considerations a major aspect of the religious thought and writing of many contemporary Arabs. Strangely enough, this emphasis was fortified in the twentieth century by the final political humiliation of the Arabs in Palestine at the hands of a movement which was itself inseparable from religion, despite its fiercely nationalistic and often secular character. The tragedy of Palestine, which for the Arabs was the final confirmation of the immorality of Western politics, emphasized at the same time for many of them the religious aspect of political activity and the pertinence of the political expression of religious sentiments even in the modern world. Palestine became for the Arabs at once the supreme political issue and the tracing upon the canvas of history of the image of traditional

accounts of eschatological events of the greatest religious importance relating to the city of Jerusalem.

The political preoccupations of the Arabs in the nineteenth century, combined with the development of a sense of frustration and also a sense of cultural weakness vis-à-vis the West, resulted finally in the attempt to adopt Western patterns of nationalism. The flame of Arab nationalism, first lit by a group of Western-educated Arabs mostly from Syria and also mostly Christian, soon transformed the political life of the Arab World. First of all it helped to break up the Ottoman Empire, then to bring independence to various Arab states, and finally to bring about the movement to seek to unify them, this last phase remaining to this day in the stage of trial and experiment. But even this force, which was originally of a purely Western and secularist origin, became gradually Muslimized as it penetrated the masses, to the extent that today Arabism, or "*ʿurūbah*," is identified closely by the majority of the common people in the Arab world almost automatically with Islam.[2] For a simple Arab Muslim in the street, any Muslim who knows a few verses of the Quran and can perform his prayers is considered to be "an Arab," for in his mind to be Arab and to be Muslim are the same. Even in educated circles in such countries as Egypt and Algeria, many people closely identify national and Islamic bonds and affiliations. Politics remains inseparable from religion and a great deal of the religious thinking of the Arabs has been devoted during the past century to political facets of Islam in the Arab World.

The attack of the West upon the Arab World, aside from its political effects, was also a direct attack against Islam as a religion. The Arab remained conscious of the fact that ever since his political subjugation, his religion and his culture became the target of innumerable assaults, ranging from out-and-out slander by older missionaries and orientalists to much more subtle techniques of "de-Islamicizing" the minds of Muslim youth in Western-owned and directed educational institutions in the Arab World. Much of Muslim religious thought, therefore, took an apologetic turn from late in the nineteenth century, and

gradually there came into being a certain type of Muslim religious thinker who had already unconsciously lost the intellectual battle to modernism and the West, and was now seeking only to defend his faith by showing that somehow practically every fashionable thought of the time had been Islamic before being adopted by the West. Even new discoveries of modern science, which, of course, soon became stale and outmoded, were traced back to the Quran as if to show that the grandeur of the Quran resided in anticipating this or that discovery of physics or biology.[3] The apologetic attitude became, because of the incessant attacks of the West, an almost ubiquitous aspect of the religious thought and writings of modernized Arabs, and to this day it remains, along with the political preoccupation mentioned above, of importance in a certain type of religious writing that is read widely by the modernized classes of society.

The attack made upon Islam hastened another tendency which had been inaugurated in the twelfth/eighteenth century in the heartland of the Arab World by Muhammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb and others to "purify" Islam by returning to the sources of the religion and doing away with the later developments of the Islamic tradition, both intellectual and artistic. Had there not been the shock of Western domination, this movement would have probably developed along lines very different from those which it actually took.[4] As it was, frustration in the face of complete domination by the West forced this movement to become more and more the rallying point for the well-known "reformist" movement associated with the names of such men as ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī and Rashīd Riḍā, to the extent that, with Rashīd Riḍā, the intellectual background of the reform of the *Salafiyyah*—as his school was called—was nearly the same as that of the Wahhābīs.[5] As for Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (Astrābādī) and his student Muhammad ᶜAbduh, they were also "reformers" but cannot be considered in any way as Wahhābīs. In both cases, however, there was, along with a positive emphasis upon the *Sharīᶜah*, an opposition to Sufism and the mystical life as well as to Islamic philosophy and much of the rest of the Islamic intel-

lectual tradition although ʿAbduh espoused the cause of what he thought was a form of "Islamic rationalism." In any case, a "rationalism" was developed among many Arab Muslim thinkers which was sometimes combined with "puritanism" and based upon a juridical and theological attitude which drew much from the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and his students and which limited the vast horizons of Islamic intellectual life to a small portion of its traditional expanse. The effect of this type of religious thinking among the educated classes in the Arab World is still considerable, especially in the Arab Near East.[6] The Maghrib of the Arab World, however, was to some extent but not completely spared from this wave which swept over Egypt and Syria, not to speak of Wahhābī Saudi Arabia, during the thirteenth Islamic century.

In opposition to this fundamentalist and puritanical tendency, there developed gradually among the Arabs from the beginning of the last century another mode of thought which preached various degrees of secularism and ranged from mild defense of Western civilization to the writings of Salāmah Mūsā and the early Ṭaha Ḥusayn, who preached the complete adoption of Western culture and a total break with the sacred ambience of traditional Islam. Of course at the very moment when such men began to defend Western culture and secularism, others such as Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfiʿī, Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūtī and Shakīb Arsalān rose and violently attacked their writings. Nevertheless, views similar to those of the secularists have continued to be held by a certain number of influential men, and the present situation of Islam among certain classes of Arab society today cannot be understood without comprehension of this background, although the present supporters of such a position follow a type of thought somewhat different from the earlier secularists.

In addition to the tendencies and movements already mentioned, another reaction began among the Arabs, mostly after the Second World War, which modified greatly the effect of these earlier movements. This new reaction was the disenchantment with the West and the realization of its moral bank-

ruptcy, made so evident by the atrocities of the World War and later in the wars in Palestine and their aftermath.[7] The blind admiration of the West espoused by so many of the "leaders" of the previous generations gave way among many intellectual and literary leaders to doubt about the value of the civilization for whose sake the Arabs were asked to forsake their own traditional religion and way of life. Some men, such as Ṭaha Ḥusayn, even recanted openly in their later writings and expressed serious misgivings about Western civilization and its fruits. This awareness, which is still in the process of transforming the Arab image of the West, has had a profound effect upon the role and function of religion among the Arabs, for it must be remembered that since the nineteenth century it has always been on the strength of arguments drawn from Western sources, and by appealing to the success of the West, that Arabs have been asked, and in fact are still being asked by certain purblind leaders of the blind, to abandon their own tradition.

In the Arab World of the later fourteenth century A.H., besides the purely intellectual and mental factors expressed in currents of thought and affecting religion on its articulated plane, there were also factors of a social and economic nature and elements dealing with everyday life that had as much—if not more—effect upon religious life as philosophical and theological ideas. In fact, today in the Islamic world in general and the Arab World in particular, Islam is being corroded more by the penetration of foreign modes of everyday living than by the scientific or agnostic philosophical ideas which have affected Christianity so greatly since the Renaissance. One of the best means of gauging the intensity of Islamic religious life is to study the degree to which the *Sharīᶜah*, in its full meaning and embracing all of life, is applied in a particular ambience. In its formal and legalistic aspect, the *Sharīᶜah* is applied in varying degrees, from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which use only *Sharīᶜite* law, to lands such as Tunisia and Algeria where much of the law is derived from European codes. On the juridical level there is discernible a complex pattern which, for the most part, shows the attempt of most Arab gov-

ernments to modify the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* but to remain as much as possible within its injunctions and principles.[8] Meanwhile, struggles have been going on in nearly every Arab country to reinstate the *Sharīᶜah* and many of the movements which are called "fundamentalist" are more than anything else concerned with this issue.

But the more difficult and profound problem is to study to what degree the mode of life, which was once dictated totally by the *Sharīᶜah*, has become secularized. Here one will discover that, surprisingly enough, even in countries where non-*Sharīᶜite* laws have been introduced, the concept of secular law or the secularization of life has remained singularly alien to the mind of the vast majority of Arabs, save for a few who are thoroughly Westernized. But the encroachment of the kind of mundane and hedonistic life which is characteristic of much of the life of modern industrial societies came to be seen in larger Arab cities and this trend has continued with ever greater intensity during the past few decades. The breaking of the injunctions of the *Sharīᶜah* concerning such questions as sexual behavior or the use of alcoholic drinks became an ever more frequent phenomenon in big cities, even by people who considered themselves definitely Muslim and who would protest violently if classified otherwise, but who were generally unaware of the contradictions involved in their manner of living. There were, however, social and political reactions to such behavior which have only intensified more recently as one can see clearly in the case of Egypt. The modernized Arab, like his Persian or Turkish counterpart, is drawn away from religion more through the temptation to create a sensuous and false "paradise" around himself than by the attempt to play the role of the divinity like an agnostic Western philosopher. For Islam, the danger comes more from men so engulfed by the life of the senses and mundanity as to forget completely the sacred aspect of life taught by religion than from the type of rationalistic philosopher who in the Renaissance destroyed the unity of Christendom and weakened the hold of faith upon men. The *Sharīᶜah* continues to be respected as the concrete expression of God's Will, but more and

more men in the big cities have allowed its hold upon their lives to be compromised by the penetration of completely un-Islamic modes of acting and living.[9]

One of the important aspects of Islam in contemporary life among the Arabs has been the appearance of movements which stand for the reestablishment of the full and complete reign of the *Sharīᶜah* over the everyday life of Muslims. These movements have ranged from the Istiqlāl party in Morocco which has also definite political and social programmes, to the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn, the most important movement of this kind to appear during the past decades in the Arab World, to more recent Islamico-political movements in Egypt, Algeria, the Sudan and elsewhere. The writings of the intellectual elite of these movements, such as Sayyid Quṭb, are based most of all upon a renewed and vigorous application of the *Sharīᶜah* to the whole of human life. The persistence of the influence of these movements, even among the young, has of course many social, political, economic and most importantly religious causes but also reveals a strong desire on the part of a significant portion of even the modernized classes for a moral revivification and renewal. The continuing appeal of men such as Ḥasan al-Bannāᵓ and Sayyid Quṭb is due not so much to their intellectual analyses of various contemporary problems, analyses which are often oblivious to the true nature of some of the forces involved, as to their firm belief in the *Sharīᶜah* and to their own personal example of adherence to the *Sharīᶜah*. The existence of movements such as that of the Ikhwān, despite its naïveté vis-à-vis many of the problems posed by the modern world, reveals the continuing hold of religion upon public life in its economic, social and political aspects, not to speak of the inner life of men.

As far as political life in the Arab World of the last Islamic century is concerned, its ever greater Islamicization, in spite of revolutionary tendencies which brought into power alien forms of government often with anti-Islamic ideologies, is truly amazing. The nationalist leaders were usually forced to come to terms more and more with the Islamic views of the masses, who

kept a constant pressure upon them.[10] And many of the leaders themselves combined and continue to combine leftist political tendencies with strong Islamic convictions. One observes in the Arab World today not only traditional rulers who are devout Muslims or at least espouse the cause of Islam publicly, but also the most revolutionary governments which combine an extreme "leftist" policy with a degree of adherence to the *Sharīᶜah* and the Islamic tradition which seems outwardly incongruent and amazes many a Western observer who has prepared a priori criteria, drawn from his own experience in the West, to study the Arab World.[11] The European type of nationalism, therefore, which is by nature against the universalism of Islam, which did much to weaken Islam in the early phases of Arab nationalism, and which also resulted in anti-Islamic tendencies in many non-Arab Muslim countries, seems after several decades to have converged paradoxically enough toward the Islamic ethos within many parts of the Arab world although it has done much to alienate Muslim peoples from each other and to dissect and divide the heritage of Islam, that belongs to all Muslim peoples by right.

Parallel with secularizing forces of every kind, one observes forces at play during the past few decades which have sought to reassert Islam more fully in the social and political fields. Furthermore, in recent years there have also become discernible tendencies which seek to achieve the same on the intellectual plane. The past half century has witnessed the turning of the interest of many men of letters to religion and religious subjects, to the extent that some of the best known among them, such as Maḥmūd al-ᶜAqqād and Ṭaha Ḥusayn, not known in their earlier writings for their interest in religion, have written later in life several biographical studies of the Prophet and the Companions, or works on other specially religious themes. Even many of the apparently secularist Arab poets have turned to Arabic Sufi poetry. This tendency complements the continuing flow of religious literature from the religious centers, especially al-Azhar, and by graduates of such centers.[12] This effort also complements the work of a small but

growing number of men and women in other walks of life who are deeply concerned with religion. One of the best know religious works to have appeared in the Arab world during the past decades, the City of Wrong, was written by Kāmil Ḥusayn,[13] and Egyptian surgeon, and there are a number of other professionals belonging to diverse fields who have written important works on Islam in Arabic.

The revival of intellectual interest in Islam, which of course did not by any means please the modernized and secularized so-called "intellectuals," usually of ultranationalistic or Marxist tendencies, was complemented by a renewal of interest in the whole tradition of Islamic thought, especially philosophy and Sufism. Traditional Islamic philosophy was revived in Egypt by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī[14] after centuries during which it had ceased to be taught in most Arab madrasahs but which had remained a living intellectual tradition in Persia and adjacent areas. During the last century, an avid study of Islamic philosophy was carried out in the Arab World, and especially Egypt, by such men as Muṣṭafā ᶜAbd al-Rāziq, Ibrāhīm Madkour, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Fuᵓād al-Ahwānī, Muḥammad Abū Rīdah, ᶜUthmān Amīn, ᶜAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and others. The efforts of such men must be seen not only as simple academic scholarship but also as an attempt to revive the intellectual heritage of Islam. Their work certainly possesses a religious significance and is related in this sense to the writings of men of letters and other classes of educated Arabs on religious subjects. The ever-growing interest in traditional Islamic thought in the Arab World is related to the general desire for a new self-discovery on the part of the modern educated classes after the disillusionment with the West, which indeed became ever more intense with the rapid decline and turmoil in modern Western society and culture. It must be added, however, that some of this interest in the Islamic intellectual tradition has been based on a rationalistic interpretation of it as one sees in the "Neo-Ibn Rushdians" in the Arab World today.

It must be remembered, however, that the intensity of religious life among the Arabs cannot be gauged by studying only

the various reactions of the Arabs to the modern world. One must also study the unchanged but ever-living traditional modes of religious life and thought which are not based simply on reactions to oncoming currents. Most Western scholars, who as already mentioned are trained by profession to study change rather than permanence and who have made an a priori judgment that only that which changes is significant, have tended to neglect the permanent elements in the traditional religious life of Muslims in general and of the Arabs in particular, and have exaggerated the importance of the so-called "reform" movements. In reality, today, the influence of the "reformists" in the Arab World is less than that of the traditional Muslim authorities both past and present. One would like to know, for example, which work of the modernist "reformers" compares in popularity with those of an al-Ghazzālī. The heart of the religious life resides and will continue to reside in traditional forms and practices, in the inner life and thought of individuals for whom Islam means an approach to the Divine and a sanctification of human life, and not a mere asset with which to further particular worldly causes, whether they be political, social or economic.

To understand religion in the contemporary Arab World, one must also understand the meaning of the still continuing congregational prayers held in every city, of the countless pilgrims who continue to be attracted to the spiritual pole of Mecca, and of the millions who visit sanctuaries, from Mulay Idris in Morocco to Raʾs al-Ḥusayn in Cairo and the Shiʿite sanctuaries of Najaf and Karbalaʾ. One must realize the vitality and the continuous subsistence of traditional religious teaching among both Sunnis and Shiʿites. One must be aware of the continuity of the intellectual traditions (despite many deviations) of Islam among the *ʿulamāʾ* (religious scholars) and the traditional learned classes, and of the life of faith (*īmān*) among the vast majority of the community, for whom prayer and devotion still constitute the celestial pattern into which human life is integrated. Any changes or reactions caused by the domination of the West and the political and cultural tragedies that have fol-

lowed can only be understood in light of the dominate presence of the still living tradition of Islam. For every Arab, young or old, who speaks of secularism, or until quite recently, of socialism or Marxism, there are many for whom no "ism" can ever replace the all-embracing reality of Islam. To grasp the religious life of the Arabs in its fullness one must be aware not only of the "renovators," "reformers" and rebels whose harm to the traditional order can hardly be over-emphasized, but also of the innumerable elements of permanence and continuity implied by the very notion of a living tradition and displayed fully by Islam in its manifestation among both Arabs and non-Arabs.

Also, in speaking of the religious life of contemporary Arabs it is not possible to overlook Sufism, which lies at the heart of the Islamic tradition and which has acted throughout Islamic history as the source for spiritual and religious regeneration, being the invisible origin of even many external and social movements of a religious nature.[15] Strangely enough, however, the majority of modern accounts of religion in the Arab World written in the West until recently failed to take account of this basic element. Before the 1970's most studies devoted in the West to Sufi orders concerned those that played a direct political role such as the Tijāniyyah and the puritanical Sanūsiyyah and it is only during the past few decades that serious attention has been paid to other orders which although not political have played a major role in the religious life of various Arab societies.[16]

The truth of the matter is that during the nineteenth century, along with the gradual penetration of modernism and secularism into the Arab World and the rise of the modernist "reformers" about whom so many studies exist in European languages, there occurred also a genuine renewal of life within several of the Sufi orders carried out by great saints who were in fact "renewers" (*majaddid*) in the traditional meaning of the word, which is very different from "reformer" (*muṣliḥ*) in its modern sense.[17] The renewal of life in the Shādhiliyyah Order and the founding of certain new branches and orders such as the Yashruṭiyyah, the Badawiyyah and the Madaniyyah, most-

ly in the Arab Middle East, and the Darqāwiyyah and ᶜAlawiyyah[18] in the Maghrib, marked a revival of an intense spiritual life that has affected and continues to affect the religious life of the community to this day.

The same forces of inner renewal can be observed throughout the twentieth century. One need only mention such figures as Shaykh Ḥabīb, Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Yashruṭiyyah, Shaykh al-Hāshimī and Shaykh ᶜAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd among many others. It is also necessary to recall especially the influence of the remarkable Algerian Darqāwī master, Shaykh Aḥmad al-ᶜAlawī, who founded a new branch of the Shādhiliyyah Order, that spread beyond the confines of the Maghrib and even the Arab World[19] and is felt far and wide to this day. Anyone who has frequented a gathering of the Shādhiliyyah-ᶜAlawiyyah Order in Damascus or Aleppo has become aware of the degree of influence of this master beyond his homeland and the extent of his living grace (barakah) within branches of the order founded by his disciples in many Arab lands as far away from each other as Syria, the Yemen and Morocco not to speak of Algeria itself.

In Egypt also, almost contemporary with Shaykh al-ᶜAlawī, another Shādhilī master, Salāmah Ḥasan al-Raḍī, founded the Ḥāmidiyyah branch of the order, which soon began to attract many into its fold.[20] Its emphasis upon both the practice of the *Sharīᶜah* and spiritual discipline has made it one of the main spiritual forces in contemporary Egypt, attracting adepts from many walks of life, including the young in universities.[21] Its role in Egypt exemplifies the basic importance of Sufism in the contemporary religious life of many parts of the Arab world.

The events of the past few decades have caused major social and political strains in the Arab World and have accentuated many of the tendencies alluded to above as well as causing new ones to come into being. A sense of bewilderment combined with emotional irrationality has captivated the minds of certain men as a result of the extreme despair and unbelievable stress caused by the injustice brought upon the Arabs by the Palestine tragedy and its aftermath, including all the extremist forms of

government that this event helped to bring into being. Also, an ever-greater degree of destruction of the religious quality of life is to be observed in the bigger cities, especially among certain segments of the youth drawn to the frivolities and trivialities of modern life. Furthermore, out-and-out secularist and anti-Islamic political ideologies have gained power in certain regions of the Arab World along with strong reactions to such phenomena through various movements now called "fundamentalist."

But along with the growth of all these anti-traditional forces and tendencies one can notice a marked renewal of interest in religion as traditionally understood, especially among the youth. It is enough to compare the number of young people who used to visit a place such as the tomb of Ibn ᶜArabī in Damascus or Raᵓs al-Ḥusayn in Cairo after the Second World War with the number who are seen there now. Both Sufism and *Sharīᶜite* practices of Islam have been attracting numerous people of late, not only from the traditional classes in the cities and the countryside, but also from certain urban classes that only a generation ago showed little interest in religion.[22] Along with the young Arabs studying in the West or in Western-oriented universities in the East who have become infatuated with various fashions of Western thought ranging from positivism to Marxism (at least before it fell into discredit), there are those who are searching again for their own roots and looking within their own tradition for an answer to the dilemma of human existence in an inhuman world whose overt contradictions become more apparent every day. The rise of religious interest in the Arab World during the past few decades is a phenomenon of central importance which can hardly be brushed aside as a momentary emotional reaction before the inevitable onslaught of complete secularism, as secularist historians would wish us to believe.

In reality, what has happened during this period is that on the one hand the blinding glitter of Western civilization has begun to fade and its innate faults and present difficulties have become more evident for many, and, on the other hand, the false gods for whose sake the modernized Arabs sought to brush

Islam aside have failed them in the worst way imaginable. The defeat in the 1967 war and the humiliations before and after could not have possibly been blamed in any way upon traditional Islamic institutions. It was the failure of modern ideologies whose adoption dated back to the nineteenth century that came into the open. For many an Arab, more recent events have only strengthened their serious disillusionment with the programme of simply aping the West. Rather, they saw and continue to see recent tragedies as a divine punishment for their having forsaken Islam. Many have come to view all these difficulties as trials which, according to the teachings of the Quran, the individual Muslim as well as Muslim society as a whole must pass through in this world. They have come to realize that in order to return to Islam they must re-discover Islam in all its fullness, not in its atrophied and apologetic form as presented by so many of the modernist "reformers" during the last centuries. This group does not of course include all Arabs by any means but the dynamic between religion and modernism began to change markedly from the 60's onward.

On the scholarly level also, a new class, small but of considerable significance, has come into being which has been and remains traditional and at the same time well acquainted with the West without being its slavish imitator. Both on the popular and the intellectual level the awareness of the necessity of taking religion seriously is to be discerned in many circles, whose members thus have returned to the living stream of the authentic Islamic tradition in both its *Sharīᶜite* and its Sufi aspects.

Today the Arab World stands at a most crucial stage of its history. There are still those who would like to secularize the Arab world and separate it from Islam as much as possible. But because Arabic was chosen as the vehicle of the Quranic revelation and the Arabs as the first propagators of Islam, the destiny of the Arabs remains inseparable from that of the whole of the Islamic world and the earthly manifestation of Islam itself. Moreover, the future well being of Arab Muslims depends upon the degree to which they are able to remember their true iden-

tity and to remain faithful to the task which their identification with Islam upon the historical scene has placed upon their shoulders. Inasmuch as it is impossible for men to remove the imprint of the Divine upon the human order, Islam continues today as the most powerful and enduring motivating force within the Arab soul and mind, and an ever-present factor in Arab life in all its aspects. It is the source to which all things must of necessity return, even if they wander away momentarily, and it continues as an objective norm which moulds the lives of and at the same time serves as the ideal for the vast majority of Arabs, both individually and collectively. Islam remains the living reality without which it is impossible to understand the Arabs today. To speak of the Arabs is to speak of a people whose language is that of the Quran, and the fabric of whose soul has been woven over the ages from elements of the Quranic revelation in a manner that makes their contemporary history inseparable from Islam and the Islamic universe into which most Muslim Arabs still are born and in which they live and die.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. There is also, of course, a sizeable Arab Christian population whose religious life deserves to be studied seriously and in itself. But in this essay we shall confine ourselves to Islam, which, besides being the religion of the vast majority of Arabs, has provided the cultural matrix over the ages for the other religious minorities among them, such as the Christians and the Jews.

2. "Even today it is still true to say that, to an Arab, Muslim means totally Arab. . ." L. Gardet, Mohammedanism, trans. by W. Burridge, New York, Hawthorne Books, 1961, p. 147.

"The synthesis is close: an identification, at times unconscious, of Islam and Arabism." W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p. 99.

3. The writings of such men as, for example, Farīd Wajdī, found mostly in al-Azhar Journal, were once very popular in the Arab World and in fact throughout the Muslim world. We have dealt with this attitude in many of our writings. See, for example, S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought.

4. This point has been emphasized by H. A. R. Gibb. See especially his well-known Modern Trends in Islam.

5. On the "reformists" there are numerous writings by Western scholars, including the well-known works of Gibb and Smith cited above; also A. Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970; and K. Cragg, Counsels in Contemporary Islam, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1965.

Arab authors have also devoted a number of studies to the reformers. See Aḥmad Amīn, *Zuᶜāmāᵓ al-iṣlāḥ fiᵓl-ᶜaṣr al-ḥadīth*, Cairo, Maktabat al-nahḍat al-miṣriyyah, 1948; and Tawfīq al-Ṭawīl, *al-Fikr al-dīnī al-islāmī fiᵓl-ᶜālam al-ᶜarabī* in *al-Fikr al-ᶜarabī fī miᵓah sanah*, Beirut, The American University Press, 1967.

On the "reformers" Tawfīq al-Ṭawīl writes, "It is possible to say that in the Wahhābī movement there appeared the emphasis upon the doctrine of Unity (*tawḥīd*), in the Sanūsī movement the connection of the religious call to effort and action with results sought in the life of this world, in Kawākibī the battle against political oppression and the call to Arab nationalism on the one hand and to socialism on the other, in Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī the sacred battle against European colonialism, in Muḥammad ᶜAbduh the placing of reason as the criterion for religious thought, and in Rashīd Riḍā zeal in spreading the call of Islam." Op. cit., p. 36. This "positive" evaluation is characteristic of a

certain type of modernized Arab who sees the role of the "reformers" completely in a positive light and views them as the saviours of Islam during their own days, forgetting the innate weakness of the position of this group vis-à-vis Western fads and trends, and their disregard for some aspect or other of the sacred tradition of Islam.

6. See I. Abu Rabiᶜ, Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World, Albany (NY), The State University of New York Press, 1996; and G. C. Anawati and M. Boormans, Tendances et courants de l'Islam arabe contemporaine, Munich, Kaiser Verlag, 1982.

7. See H. A. R. Gibb, "The Reaction of the Middle East against Western Culture," in his Studies on the Civilization of Islam, ed. by S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk, London, 1962, Chap. 14. J. Bercque has also analyzed this tendency in many of his writings.

8. See N. J. Coulson, A History of Islamic Law, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1964.

9. On the central importance of the *Sharīᶜah*, see S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chap. IV; and M. H. Kamali, Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1991.

10. "As soon as the nationalists come to power, there opens a hidden inner contradiction between the handfuls of leaders and the relentless omnipresent pressure of those surrounding them, a pressure which has become all the more insistent since the moral bankruptcy of the West and of the Westernized classes has become apparent." H. A. R. Gibb, Studies on the Civilization of Islam, p. 330.

11. A country such as Syria is amazing in its combining of "leftist" political programmes with a remarkable degree of adherence to the *Sharīᶜah*.

12. Even as far as Ashᶜarite writings are concerned, there are without doubt a greater amount of activity and a wider dissemination among various classes of society of writings by such men as Muḥammad al-Bahiy, Shaykh Shaltūt and others than there were before.

13. *Qariyah ẓālimah*, trans. by K. Cragg as The City of Wrong, London, One World Publications, 1959.

14. See M. Mahdi, "Islamic Philosophy in Contemporary Islamic Thought," in God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought, pp. 99 ff.

15. For example, it should be recalled that Ḥasan al-Bannāʾ, the founder of the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn, was a member of a branch of the Shādhiliyyah Order in his youth.

16. See J. Abu'n-Nasr, The Tijaniya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World, New York, Oxford University Press, 1965; and N. Z. Ziadeh, *Sanūsiyah*, Leiden, Brill, 1958.

As for other Sufi orders not necessarily active in the political realm, one can cite the scholarly study of J. Spencer Trimingham, The Sufi Orders in Islam, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, pp. 110 ff., where the traditional revivals within the Sufi orders have been at least listed. For more recent studies concerning Sufi orders in the Arab world see V. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint-Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, Austin (TX), University of Texas Press, 1998; R. S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1990; V. Hoffman, Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt, Columbia (SC), University of South Carolina Press, 1995; and J. Johansen, Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

17. Most religious "reforms" of the kind studied and debated so often by modern scholars are deformations rather than reformations, by men who want to reform religion rather than to reform themselves. "The only means of 'reforming' religion is to reform oneself." F. Schuon, "No Activity Without Truth," Studies in Comparative Religion, Autumn, 1969, p. 199; also The Sword of Gnosis, p. 34.

18. See T. Burckhardt (trans.) Letters of a Sufi Master, Louisville (KY), Fons Vitae, 1998.

19. Thanks to the beautiful book of M. Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, the figure of Shaykh al-ʿAlawī is now well known in the West.

20. See M. al-Kuhin al-Fāsī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā'l-shādhiliyyah*, Cairo, al-Maktabat al-fāsiyyat al-miṣriyyah, 1928, and ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *al-Madrasat al-shādhiliyyah al-ḥadīthah*, Cairo, Dār al-kutub al-ḥadīthah, 1968.

21. "La modération qui caractérise la Ḥāmidiyyah, laquelle reste attachée à la tradition de la Shādhiliyya, tout en l'adoptant à la vie de l'Egypte moderne, explique pourquoi tent de jeunes gens, parmi lesquels on compte des universitaires, se sentent attirés par cette Tariqa, qui est une des expressions les plus remarquables du soufisme." E. Bannerth, "Aspects de la Shādhiliyya," Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain des Etudes Orientales (Cairo), Vol. 11, 1972, pp. 248-49.

22. "Finally, many educated men have recently become greatly interested in several aspects of religion. Professors, judges, higher civil servants and army officers have been meeting spontaneously and

unobtrusively in mosques and private home to read the Koran together, discuss mysticism, and even to perform the famous dhikr . . . such groups seem to have increased considerably in the last decade or so.' M. Berger, Islam in Egypt Today, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 74. The same holds true for most countries of the Arab Near East and this trend has continued since Berger made his observations a generation ago.

CHAPTER 9

ISLAM IN PERSIA TO THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW ISLAMIC CENTURY

The situation of Islam in the Arab World differs from its situation in the rest of the Islamic World in that the Arab Muslim, even if modernized, does not usually see in his pre-Islamic past anything but the "Age of Ignorance" (*al-jāhiliyyah*), which he can hardly extol even in a modernistic and nationalistic milieu (although there have been a few exceptions to this norm), and also in that the contemporary Arab Muslim cannot separate himself from his ethnic and linguistic attachment to the Arab ambience which was the original recipient of the Quranic revelation.[1] In contrast to this situation, the non-Arab Muslims possess a distinct pre-Islamic past completely different from the background within which Islam was revealed, and do not share the ethnic and linguistic bonds with the earthly embodiment of the Quranic revelation, at least not to the same extent as do the Arabs.

This distinction is particularly true in the case of Persians, who had a brilliant pre-Islamic civilization of great spiritual and artistic beauty, and played a major role in the very foundation of Islamic civilization.[2] They and the Arabs (*al-ʿarab waʾl-ʿajam* in traditional Islamic sources) together founded Islamic civilization and have influenced nearly every phase of its subsequent history. In fact, although Islamic thought and culture succeeded in freeing themselves from becoming only "Arabic" or "Persian" during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, both of

these peoples left their indelible mark upon the historical deployment and development of later Islamic civilization. The Persians, on the one hand, played a central role in building Islamic civilization[3] and, on the other, were able to integrate within the universal perspective of Islam many elements of their pre-Islamic past, which thus became completely Islamicized. They therefore not only became thoroughly Islamic and have remained one of the most productive of Islamic peoples intellectually and artistically, but they were also able to preserve their own identity and remain distinctly Persian, creating a second cultural locus within the unity of Islamic civilization, which in its classical phase and almost up to modern times could be divided culturally into the Arabic and the Iranic zones. The situation of Islam in Persia in modern times, modernism's threat to the remarkable unity created between Persia's ancient past and Islam and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 cannot therefore be understood without reference to the historical background and an analysis of the forces and elements that were integrated to create the classical Islamic culture of Persia.[4]

When we look at Persia today, we see that it is one of the most overwhelmingly Muslim countries in the world.[5] The life of the vast majority of contemporary Persians today is dominated and molded completely by Islam, while, at the same time, the religious and cultural life of the country naturally reflects the long history of the Persian people. Because the Persians became thoroughly Islamicized and yet created a distinctly Persian Islamic culture related on a certain plane with their pre-Islamic past,[6] to understand their present-day religious life, particularly in the form of *Ithnā ᶜAsharī* or Twelve-Imam Shiᶜism, which is dominant in Persia today, it is necessary to cast a brief glance at the religious history of the people who have lived on the Iranian plateau during the past three thousand years.

Persia has been both a center from which major religious influences have radiated and a crossroads, at which the religious traditions of the Mediterranean world and Asia have met,

resulting often in new currents of religious life. Having originally belonged to the same ethnic and linguistic stock as the Aryan conquerors of India, the early Iranians who settled on the plateau possessed a religion akin to that of the Vedas. From this early background there arose the reform of Zoroaster and the establishment of the specifically Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. Although the dates of Zoroaster are still much debated, there is no doubt that in the fifth century BC his teachings became the official religion of the Persian empire. The sacred book of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, is the most precious religious document of the early history of Persia as well as a basic source for the study of the Iranian languages. Zoroastrianism, with its firm belief in the angelic world, its accent upon the moral dimension of human existence, its emphasis upon the reality of the after-life and Last Judgment, and its stress upon the purity of the elements and the sacred character of human life, left an imprint both on the later religious life of Western Asia in general and on the general outlook of the Persians in particular throughout their later history.[7]

The positive qualities which this religion implanted in the souls of the Persians survived and became transmuted by the Islamic norm after Zoroastrianism itself had decayed and lost the spiritual struggle against the new forces of Islam. For example, the care that many devout Persians take in keeping their clothing, food and habitat clean in a ritual sense, sometimes even over-emphasizing this element of religion, is founded upon an old Zoroastrian teaching reinforced by the emphasis of Islam upon cleanliness. Whatever survived of Zoroastrianism in the Persian soul was, however, thoroughly Islamicized and interpreted in the light of the unitary point of view of Islam.

From the matrix of Zoroastrianism, which is the stable and orthodox background of Iranian religions, there grew several religious movements which had worldwide repercussions and also shook the foundations of Zoroastrianism itself. With the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, Hellenistic influences spread throughout the domain of the Persian people. This cultural movement was combined with a religious one known as

Mithraism (considered as a distinct religious movement and not general devotion to Mithra, that antedated Zoroastrianism itself) which itself contained important Hellenistic elements. The mystery cult of Mithra, which spread as far West as Germany and Scandinavia, was a synthesis of Zoroastrian, Hellenistic, Babylonian and Anatolian elements, as well as pre-Zoroastrian Persian religious practices. If, for the world at large, this religious movement meant the spread of Iranian religious elements, for Persia itself it implied perhaps more than anything else the establishment of a religious sanction for the syncretic cultural life through which the Persians were now passing as a result of the conquests of Alexander and the establishment of Seleucid rule.

During the Parthian period, Zoroastrianism and the proper Persian cultural tradition began to reassert themselves until, with the advent of the Sassanids, the religion of Zoroaster became once again the official state religion, remaining in this position until the fall of the Sassanid Empire. Nevertheless, its authority did not go unchallenged even on the religious plane. In the third century AD, a second world sweeping Iranian mystery religion, Manichaeism, appeared upon the scene. Its founder, Mani, first found favor with the Sassanid ruler but was finally put to death through the opposition of the Zoroastrian priesthood. His religion nevertheless spread from China to France and had many adherents in Persia itself. At once a socially revolutionary and religiously mystical movement, it marked a major protest against established religious institutions. Although some of its cosmogonic and cosmological teachings found a place in certain forms of Islamic philosophy, for Persians of the later period Manichaeism appeared as a rebellion against religious authority. During the Islamic period it never enjoyed the same status as Zoroastrianism, from whose background it came into being and against which it revolted.

The Sassanid period was also witness to other religious movements such as Mazdakism, a "religious communism" known today mostly through what its enemies, both Zoroastrian and Christian, wrote against it. This movement,

which was soon crushed, was again a protest against the Zoroastrian social order and foretold the collapse of this order which occurred with the coming of Islam. Also at this time there developed within Zoroastrianism the philosophico-religious school known as Zurvanism, which indicated a blend of Iranian religious thought with certain Greek philosophical ideas. Finally, it must be remembered that through rivalry with the Byzantines the Sassanids encouraged and supported Oriental Christian sects, especially the Nestorians. These sects were give a free hand to establish schools and missions throughout the Sassanid Empire, with the result that notable Christian communities came into existence in Persia and remained an important minority religious community in the Islamic period. The Jews also had had several centers in Persia from Achaemenian times, and continued their community life under both Zoroastrian and Muslim rule. The tolerance toward minority religions shown by Cyrus the Great who freed the Jews from their Babylonian captivity has been with a few exceptions the rule in the religious history of Persia.

The major spiritual transformation in Persia came, strangely enough, not from one of the new members of the family of Iranian religions but from a religion of Abrahamic and Semitic background, namely Islam. Although the military defeat of the Sassanids before the Arab armies was a sudden and rapid process, the spiritual struggle between Islam and Zoroastrianism and the Islamicization of Persia were a gradual one and did not really terminate until the fourth/tenth century. This fact itself indicates that the Persians accepted Islam, not through force, as is claimed by some modern historians, but because of an inner spiritual need. When the Persians regained their political independence from the caliphate, there were still very sizeable Zoroastrian communities in Persia. But instead of showing any inclination to return to this tradition, with very few exceptions nearly every newly independent Persian ruler became himself the champion for the spread of Islam, while insisting on the independence of not only the political but also the literary and cultural life of Persia. Most of the Muslim lands

of Asia have, in fact, been Islamicized through the intermediary of the Persian form of Islam. And to this day, when a Persian thinks of the domain of "Persian culture" he sees before him nearly the whole of the Eastern lands of Islam (excluding to some extent Southeast Asia), from the Western borders of the Iranian plateau to Western China, with Iraq as an intermediary realm where the Persian, Arabic and, later Turkish elements met.

During early Islamic history Persia was dominated by the Sunni form of Islam. In fact it was from Khurasan that the theological defense of Sunnism was made during the tenth and eleventh centuries, by such masters of theology as al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazzālī, when many other lands of Islam were dominated by Shi^{c}ism. Yet, certain centers in Persia such as Qum were from the beginning Shi^{c}ite and the Persians in general had a particular reverence for the household of the Prophet of Islam from the earliest centuries of Islamic history. The figure of Salmān al-Farsī, the Persian, who in search of the ideal prophet journeyed all the way to Arabia to meet the Prophet and became so close to him as to be called "one of the members of the household" (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet, has had the deepest significance for the religious consciousness of Islamic Persia.[8] During the early Islamic centuries, therefore, Persia was at once a major center of Sunni Islam, producing such religious scholars and theologians as al-Bukhārī, al-Ghazzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and a land within which important centers of Shi^{c}ism existed, where many of the greatest early Shi^{c}ite jurisprudents and theologians such as Ibn Bābūyah and al-Kulaynī were born and nurtured.

Before the Mongol invasion, which was a devastating material and social calamity for Persia, the forces of Ismā^{c}īlism were also strong in this land. Although the early center of their power was in Egypt and later in the Yemen, from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries onward, there were outstanding philosophers and theologians of this school in Persia, men such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who have left us so many doctrinal works on

Ismāᶜīlism. Moreover, with the "resurrection of Alamut," Ismāᶜīlism gained major political power in northern Persia and continued to exert political pressure until the destruction of Alamut by Hülagü.

Between the Mongol invasion and the establishment of the Safavids, Persia moved gradually toward Shiᶜism through social, political and purely religious factors marked by the activity of certain Sufi orders and several outstanding Shiᶜite theologians.[9] Yet, at the time of the establishment of the Safavids and the recognition of Shiᶜism as the official state religion, most of Persia was still Sunni. The change, however, came about relatively rapidly and soon the country became predominately Shiᶜite, although noticeable Sunni elements have survived to this day in such areas as Khurasan, Kurdistan and Baluchistan.

Persia was also from the beginning of Islamic history one of the lands in which Sufism, the esoteric and mystical dimension of Islam, spread rapidly and expressed itself in the most striking literary and artistic forms. Some of the greatest early Sufis, such as Basṭāmī and Ḥallāj were Persian, and later the direct influence of Sufism transformed Persian poetry into one of the most universal forms of literature. Through both the direct presence of Sufi orders and the effect of Sufism upon Persian literature, music, architecture and other forms of art as well as certain social organizations, the spirit of Sufism has left an indelible mark upon many facets of the life of Persians.[10] It must be remembered, however, that being esoteric in character, Sufism has always preserved its inner teachings for only those who have been qualified to follow the Sufi path. It is only the external manifestations of Sufism that have a general cultural and social bearing and are such a noticeable strand in the fabric of Persian life and culture.

It is in light of this background that we must study the role of Islam in present-day Persia. Because of this long period during which the Persians have become Islamicized in the deepest sense possible, the worldview of the Persian today is determined more than anything else by the teachings of Islam. Like

other Muslims, the vast majority of Persians are born, live and die with the verses of the Noble Quran echoing in their ears. They see the world about them in light of the conception of the Divine and His creation as delineated in the Noble Quran. There is, in fact, in spite of the secularist tendencies of the past fifty years, still no conception of a way of life among the vast majority of Persians in which religion would be seen as only one element among many or of a worldview in which the religious factor would be only one dimension. The total worldview is religious, and even the apparent negation of religion by certain people has itself a religious significance.

The universe in which the Persian lives, like that of all Muslims, is one created and sustained by Allah, the Omnipotent and Omniscient Creator, Who is at once the Origin and End of all things, the First and the Last. His Will reigns supreme over both the world of nature and the lives of men and women and their societies. He has knowledge of all things and His majesty causes all that is beside Him to melt into nothingness. Yet He has given man free will to pursue his own life and to choose the "right path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) of his own accord, without compulsion. The secret of man's life lies in the symbiosis of these two outwardly contradictory assertions, of the absolute Omnipotence of Allah and of man's free will and responsibility before Him as the Supreme Judge.[11] Every Muslim is aware throughout his life of the ultimate significance of his actions beyond this world of change and corruption. The Persian Muslim, like his other brethren in faith, may, because of his own weakness, sometimes live a life that is mundane and even directly against various Divine injunctions, but he never doubts for one moment the presence of the Divine Command (al-amr) and his responsibility to follow it. As already stated for Muslims in general, so also for Persians it can be said that there are some who do not heed the voice of the Divine, but there is practically no one who doubts the presence of "His voice." That is why after a life of debauchery a man may become suddenly devout, and even in the midst of the most profane life remains aware of the presence of the transcendent dimension of life.

Inasmuch as the Will of God is manifested in Islam in the

form of a concrete and all-embracing law, the *Sharī'ah*, the Muslim is always aware of the religious character of all facets of life. Since the *Sharī'ah* covers all aspects of human life, to the vast majority of Muslims all laws which they encounter and all acts which they perform during their daily lives possess a sacred character even if non-*Sharī'ite* laws have been promulgated in certain domains. Most Persians feel that they are performing a religious duty when they work to make a living, even if the particular work they perform is not itself of a traditional religious nature. By contrast, the small Western-educated classes that have been affected by the Western distinction between the religious and the secular often do not attach this religious significance to their daily work. For them the *Sharī'ah* is identified with specific acts of worship which in fact they rarely perform. But they are a small minority. For most Persians, both the uneducated and the educated, the all-embracing nature of the Divine Will, which governs all facets of man's life through a sacred law, is very much a reality and a permanent factor in their general worldview.

The Divine Will is also seen by Persian Muslims, as by other Muslims in general, in the world of nature, of which the phenomena, in conformity with the teachings of the Noble Quran, are seen as "signs of God." There is no ultimate distinction between the Divine Law governing men and the laws governing nature, between religious and natural law as understood in the modern West.[12] Nature is a complementary aspect of the religious reality that is revealed directly through revelation. It can therefore incite the deepest intellectual and contemplative response in the traditional Persian, who turns to it both as a source of enjoyment and as the background for the spiritual life. The very austerity of nature in Persia, the sublime mountains, the vast deserts and the green valleys hidden high in mountain ranges evoke an awareness of the Transcendent. The visible itself is but a veil for the invisible and the laws of the world of nature but a part of the universal law which of necessity governs all things.

The traditional Persian is also keenly aware of the transient nature of things, a point so often emphasized in Islam. He

lives with the reality of death and a realization of the instability of all that surrounds him. For him the angelic world, the hierarchy of spiritual beings that stands above the world of material forms, is a constant reality, one that is emphasized in both the ancient religions of Iran and in Islam. If this world is impermanent and transient, there stand beyond it the Divine Reality and the abiding and luminous world of angelic substances.[13]

The awareness of the transient nature of this world is combined with a great joy in life and its beauties which reflect the beauty of the higher orders of existence. Few people are given as much to the enjoyment of life's pleasures and beauties as the Persians, but this attitude is always compensated for by the realization that a moment once gone never returns and all that is physical and sensual has an ephemeral character about it. These two attitudes are often reflected even in the distinctly religious activity of chanting the Noble Quran, during which people weep and are carried beyond worldly cares, but which is frequently held in the most beautiful gardens where the best refreshments are served and the voice of the reciter possesses the finest musical quality. At their most spiritual level, these two attitudes are to be found in Persian Sufi poetry: here one is constantly reminded that the Infinite reflects an aspect of Its beauty at each moment, but because of Its Infinity Its theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) are never the same and do not repeat themselves.[14]

There is also an element of tragedy which characterizes the Persian and which is seen fully in the ethos of Shi^{c}ism. This is not the humanistic tragedy of the later Greeks, related to the rebellion of man against the gods, associated with the Promethean mentality so characteristic of the decadent period of Greek culture and also post-mediaeval Europe, but is a spiritual quality based on man's submission to God and yet nostalgia within his soul because of his separation from Him.[15] The tragic and sad element (*ḥuzn*), which does not at all negate the aspect of joy (*faraḥ*) in life, is of a religious character and a basis for contemplation. It is most directly reflected in classical

Persian music, where the apparently sad quality is in reality a nostalgia for the Divine. It is a tragedy based on the realization that the human condition contains an apparent contradiction. Man is in desperate need to realize the Divine and to become aware of his spiritual nature. Yet this realization is made so difficult because of the distance that separates him from the Divine and by his need to await Divine assistance to accomplish this end.[16]

Closely connected with this point of view is the concept of the intermediary and intercessor before God, and the expectation of a future saviour, both so important to Shi'ism. In his spiritual life, man is in need of an intermediary between himself and God although as a Muslim he stands directly before God in the canonical prayers and has always direct access to Him. Even after the descent of a revelation, the role of the intermediary must continue on the inward plane. Therefore, after the Prophet of Islam there must be Imams who act as intermediaries between men of later generations and God. There must also be a future saviour, the Mahdī, who will redeem the world from its state of corruption. From the Shi'ite point of view, he too is an Imam, in fact the twelfth Imam of Shi'ism, but an Imam who, although living and present, is in occultation (*ghaybah*) and will not reveal himself until a future moment known only to God. The very expectation of his appearance (*intiẓār*) is a religious virtue. The ideals of appealing to saints and Imams and of patiently awaiting one who will in the future eradicate injustice and corruption and therefore end the hardships of present-day life are constant elements of the Persian religious outlook.

As far as religious institutions and organizations are concerned, the most important centre in the life of the Persians, as in that of other Muslims, is the mosque, whose size varies from the colossal Friday mosques of major cities to single rooms in small towns and villages. Its architecture also varies from ornate tiled mosques to mud structures whose walls are covered by whitewash. In all its forms, the mosque is the center of both religious and social activity for the community. Its door being

always open, it remains a calm sanctuary amidst the turmoil of daily life, a place where people wander in to say their prayers as well as to consider a transaction or simply to relax with friends in the contemplative and peaceful atmosphere which the mosque creates. In the cities in fact, the bigger mosques are nearly always situated in the bazaars and are an inseparable part of daily life.[17]

The mosque is also used for congregational prayers, particularly those on Friday, as well as for special occasions of religious mourning or feasting funerals. The Friday prayers, however, were less emphasized in Persia before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 than in those Muslim lands where Sunnī Islam predominates. This was because in the absence of the Mahdī the Friday prayers, according to most traditional Shi^{c}ite ^{c}*ulamā*$^{\circ}$, did not carry the same political significance as they do in Sunni Islam. Rather, the religious climate was such that the canonical prayer performed individually and often at home were considered as important as prayers at mosques, so that many who did not go regularly to mosques nevertheless did perform their prayers and other religious rites privately at home. Although this practice continues among many, the significance of the Friday prayers has changed greatly in recent years and they have become of central political as well as religious importance since the advent of the Revolution.

Before the Revolution the role of the mosque differed both in the life of the country dweller in comparison with the city dweller, and of the traditional Persian in comparison to a modernized one. In the countryside, the imam of the mosque often acted as the teacher for elementary education, especially early religious education, and he was the arbitrator in most disputes. After daily prayers, people usually gathered about him to pose questions about problems which would otherwise have to be taken to court. In the smaller cities, these customs were retained to a large degree, but in larger cities both functions, elementary education and judging cases, were performed outside the mosque, although in the second case the arbitrator was himself usually a religious authority. The larger mosques in big

cities also performed an educational service on a higher level, in that they were usually connected to a religious school or *madrasah* in which more advanced religious education is carried out. Much of this pattern has continued since the Revolution but there have also been notable changes especially in the social and political role of the mosque in big cities.

As for modern educated classes, particularly those who were educated in the West, as a rule before the Revolution, they did not go to mosques except on special occasions. Many of them did make pilgrimages or participated in the mourning of Muḥarram or funeral rites, all of which are usually connected with mosques but they rarely attended their local mosques for daily prayers. Although there were notable exceptions, one can say that in this aspect of religious life they were sharply distinguished from the rest of Persian society.

The *madrasah* system, which has its roots in the early centuries of Islamic history, is the means whereby the intellectual aspect of the religious tradition is kept alive. In these schools, which are endowed and usually connected with a major mosque, students who have undergone an early religious education continue their studies. They are fully supported by the *madrasah*, receiving accommodation on the premises as well as board and other expenses. There is no pressure on them to finish their studies in a certain period as in modern universities, nor are any specific degrees conferred upon them. Some stay in a madrasah for their whole life and, if competent, become teachers in their turn. The students mostly choose the field of the transmitted (*naqlī*) sciences, studying law, the principles of jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, *ḥadīth*, etc. Some, however, choose the intellectual (*ʿaqlī*) sciences and pursue logic, Islamic philosophy, theology, etc.

The largest *madrasah* system today, which is in Qum, has tens of thousands of students, and there are other major centers in Mashhad, Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and several other cities. Moreover, besides the official lessons taught in the madrasah, classes are often held in the homes of individual professors and masters, often in more advanced phases of study. These classes

are particularly important in the field of traditional Islamic philosophy or theosophy (*ḥikmah*) as well as of gnosis (*ʿirfān*). In both these private circles and the classes of the *madrasahs*, many who do not belong to the madrasahs also participate, including often some who have had a modern rather than a purely traditional education. One could even say that most of the teaching of the Islamic intellectual sciences in Persia today is performed outside formal institutions and in private circles.

Shrines, or tombs of the Shiʿite Imams, their descendants and Sufi saints, play a major role in the life of all classes of Persians. They consist usually of a mausoleum and a mosque, often with a *madrasah* and a library attached, and are supported by endowments and donations. Of those within Persia itself, the most important is that of the eighth Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, in Mashhad, which is visited by hundreds of thousands of people every season. It has a vast complex of mosques and courtyards around the central mausoleum, as well as dispensaries, hospitals, a major library, a museum, *madrasahs*, etc. Over a thousand people are fed at each meal free of charge and there is no time of the year when the shrine is not completely filled with throngs of the faithful from not only all corners of Persia itself but also the Arab World, the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent and Central Asia.

Next to Mashhad, the city of Qum is the most important, inasmuch as it is the site of the tomb of Imam Riḍā's sister, Ḥaḍrat-i Maʿṣūmah, and the seat of Shiʿite learning and of the most influential Shiʿite *mujtahids*.[18] It, too, is frequented by many pilgrims throughout the year. The tombs of Ḥaḍrat-i ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm near Tehran in Rayy, Shāh Chirāgh in Shiraz and Shāh Niʿmatallāh Walī, the famous Sufi, near Kirman, are all shrine institutions of prime importance. Other shrines are often located on tops of mountains in difficult locations, in awesome sites of nature connected with the traditional science of sacred geography. There is no city or town without a site of pilgrimage and a saint to whom the people turn in their moments of trial as well as in moments of thankfulness. All of these shrines play a fundamental role in daily religious life, inasmuch as people

turn to these saints as intermediaries between them and God and ask through them as friends of God what they wish to ask of God. There is hardly anyone in Persia, even the most modern, for whom the power of the grace or *barakah* of these shrines has ceased to exist.

The Sufi centers, called *khānqāh* in Persian, are also major focuses of religious life, although Sufism itself transcends the exoteric dimension of religion and is concerned with the esoteric teachings of Islam. The *khānqāh* is usually either adjoined to the home of a living Sufi master or adjacent to the tomb of a dead one which has become the centre of the order. In either case, it is a complex of buildings in which the *fuqarā'*, or dervishes, meet for their sessions of spiritual practice and where there are rooms for travelling dervishes as well as cells of those who make spiritual retreats (*khalwah*). On special religious holidays such as the birthdays of the Prophet and ʿAlī as well as during days of mourning the *khānqāhs* open their doors to all who come to participate in the ceremonies held there. Even at other times the *khānqāh* acts a pole of spiritual attraction for the community itself, even if those outside its organization are not completely aware of all that is taught within its walls to members of the order.

The major Sufi orders in Persia today are the Niʿmatullāhī, with main branches throughout the country; the Gunābādī (itself a branch of the Niʿmatullāhī) centered in Khurasan; the Dhahabī with its major centre in Shiraz; the Qādirī, powerful mostly in Kurdistan, Baluchistan and the Persian Gulf region; the Khāksār, popular especially among craftsmen; and the Naqshbandī, having its center in Kurdistan. These orders, many of which have close contacts with branches in other Muslim lands, continue to influence the general structure of society and cultural life, in particular literature, music and calligraphy. The very presence of a living gnostic path of spirituality also has its effect on intellectual pursuits, especially traditional Islamic philosophy, which for this very reason is not just a rational form of knowledge but a theosophy or *ḥikmah*, ultimately an aid to spiritual realization. But, of course, because of

the nature of Sufism, the profoundest influence of its teachings remains confined within the circle of the spiritual elite.

The institution of religious endowment (*waqf*), which is one of the important Islamic institutions, is the means whereby the above-mentioned religious organizations as well as many others are in most cases supported and maintained. Usually cultivated lands, but also pastures, wells, trees, etc., are given as endowment for a particular religious institution. A person is chosen to act as a keeper and executor of the endowment, and under his direction the income is to be spent in accordance with the will of the founder. Before the Revolution, a certain amount of organization had been given to this matter through the establishment of a department of *waqf* by the government.[19] But the institution was far from being completely government-controlled, and in most cases it was still the person in charge of the endowment or his family who held the power in its hands.

In traditional Persian society, as in other traditional societies, every social institution possessed religious and spiritual significance. In modern times, although, as a result of the encroachment of secularism, some of these institutions no longer have a direct religious coloring, others have a religious connection even if they are not, strictly speaking, religious organizations. Of these the guilds (*aṣnāf*) are of great importance. Existing in all the bigger cities, the guilds draw members of a particular occupation such as bakers, bricklayers or carpet weavers into an organization which still preserves in many fields its original connection with Sufi orders and the chivalrous brotherhoods or *futuwwāt*. Most of the guilds have a particular reverence for ᶜAlī, the traditional patron saint of all Islamic guilds, and possess a strong feeling of fraternity. Even labor organizations which resemble unions in the Western sense possess some of the characteristics of the guilds, and it is difficult in many cases to draw a clear line between the guild and the union.

In certain quarters, some social significance still pertains to the remnants of orders of chivalry centered around gymnasia called *zūr-khānah*. Again closely connected with the name of

ᶜAlī, these orders have served traditionally to enhance the spirit of chivalry (*jawān-mardī*) and to build up moral and spiritual character. In their centers, bodily exercises are performed to the beating of a drum and the chanting or religious and epic verses. Traditional Persian cities, like other Muslim cities, have had local strong men who have kept the peace and protected the morals (*nāmūs*) of their quarters of the city. Such types have usually been connected in Persia with the *zūr-khānah* and still perform this function in many cities, although they stand in rather stark contrast to some of the modernized youth who are devoid of the traditional virtues of chivalry inculcated by these orders.

Finally, mention must be made of certain organizations founded in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, usually connected with bureaucratic professions and some affiliated to Sufi orders. There were also lodges of Freemasons which, in the Persian climate, had in a few cases gained a Muslim coloring, while some attempts were even being made to connect them to certain of the *khānqāhs*.[20] In a few cases, there came into being a Persian version of an organization resembling these lodges but of a more directly religious character and attracting many from the modern educated classes. In most of these cases, a certain religious or ethical element was present, though it varied from one organization, and even from one individual, to another.[21]

Because of the all-embracing nature of the Sacred Law or *Sharīᶜah*, there is in reality no aspect of social life in Persia, as in the rest of the Muslim world, which is completely divorced from religious principles, even if modernism and older historical forces resuscitated as a result of the influence of modernism removed certain aspects of social life from the direct jurisdiction of the *Sharīᶜah*. Those domains of social life in which the *Sharīᶜah* was still directly applied in Persia before the Revolution were personal law such as marriage, divorce, etc., as well as much of civil law. In this latter domain, even what was taken from European codes was taken with the approval of some of the *ᶜulamāᵓ* and was integrated into the matrix of the

Sharīᶜah through the practice of "independent juridical opinion" or *ijtihād*. Moreover, those who practiced law and administered it before the Revolution were nearly all either products of the *madrasahs* or the law schools and theological faculties where they were exposed to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Since 1979 the government has sought to re-introduce the *Sharīᶜah* into all domains of life but the process has not as yet succeeded fully.

It is rather in the domain of economic life that non-*Sharīᶜite* practices are most often seen. In the field of taxation, non-Islamic systems have been enforced from Umayyad times in addition to the Islamic religious tax which, in Shi'ism consists of *zakāh* and *khums*. Most people, especially merchants in the bazaars, do, however, continue to pay the religious taxes voluntarily in addition to other taxes demanded by the government. The religious tax is, in fact, a major source of support for centers of Shiᶜite learning in such cities as Qum, and since the Revolution it has been made compulsory.

The religious spirit manifests itself in economic life not only in specific norms as also in attitudes. The Islamic view of the permitted (*ḥalāl*) and forbidden (*ḥarām*), the condemnation of usury, of amassing wealth in gold and silver, or usurping the right of orphans, and many other injunctions, even if not practiced by many penetrate subtly into economic life. Also, the more philosophical attitude of uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring, distrust of purely human causation, the feeling of the impermanence of things, all play their role in fields of economic life where specific religious norms may seem to be absent.

As for political life, Shiᶜism in contrast to Sunnism does not accept the religious legitimacy of the institution of the caliphate and during most of its history believed the monarchy to be the least imperfect form of government in the absence of the Mahdī. Traditionally the Persian monarchy possessed a religious aspect. Ever since the establishment of Shiᶜism as the official state religion by the Safavids, the monarch was considered from the religious point of view as the legitimate ruler who should

govern with the consent of the "religious scholars" or *ʿulamāʾ*, whose duty it was to uphold the *Sharīʿah* and to promulgate Islam. This point was explicitly mentioned in the 1906 Persian constitution. The connection between the monarchy and the religious structure of Shiʿism in Persia was a persistent element of Persian history during the past four centuries and gave a religious tone to political life even after parliamentary government, which is not an institution of Islamic origin, was established after the Constitutional Revolution in which many *ʿulamāʾ* participated. Needless to say, this situation changed completely when Ayatollah Khomeini established the direct rule of the jurisprudent (*wilāyat-i faqīh*) with the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

The confrontation between religious and modern secular norms is best seen in the modern educational system in Persia. There are, in fact, two systems of education in Persia today even after the Islamic Revolution, one of the *madrasahs* which produce religious scholars, lawyers, imams of mosques, etc., and the other the modern educational system leading to university degrees in various fields. Here religion is taught as a subject among others in the elementary school, secondary school and college curricula, but one does not find in this system the pervasive religious character of all education that has always existed in traditional Islamic *madrasahs*. In the universities also, besides faculties of theology, subjects connected with religious philosophy, law, etc., are taught in faculties of letters and law, but here again other subjects are left outside the religious sphere. There is a direct confrontation between religious and secular disciplines of learning, a confrontation which did not exist in the traditional Islamic worldview where every science, be it natural, mathematics or philosophical, possessed a traditional and sacred aspect and was never divorced from the total religious and intellectual life of Islam. Today, an attempt is being made to bring the two systems closer together but efforts have not been completely successful until now.

As far as philosophy is concerned, it is important to note that traditional Islamic philosophy is still very much alive in

Persia.[22] Secular European schools of philosophy are taught in universities but have had comparatively little effect upon the general intellectual life of the country. In fact the very presence of a living Islamic intellectual tradition has prevented false and shallow modern interpretations of Islam in Persia such as one finds in the works of most of the so-called reformers in some other Muslim countries. Moreover, as mentioned before, even modern philosophical discussions, once translated into the Persian language, have had to take cognizance of the presence of the Islamic philosophical tradition.

In literature, architecture, the plastic arts, music, theatre, and other forms of artistic and cultural life, traditional forms which have a completely religious and spiritual basis subsist while modern forms have been introduced with varying degrees of "success" among certain classes. In such cases as the theatre, where the traditional form consisted solely of passion plays, Western forms of theatre depicting problems of Western man have had little appeal to the vast majority of the population, their popularity remaining limited to the few, among Western-educated people located mostly in Tehran. Some attempts have also been made to use Persian and Islamic themes and motifs and in the last few years and have met with some success. In the other arts, the traditional forms have sometimes been used in new contemporary settings, occasionally with success, but often with a result that falls far short of genuine traditional art forms. But by and large, the traditional religious forms of artistic and cultural expression subsist and in certain cases dominate, while the modernized minority in Persian society continues to surround itself with various aspects of Western artistic expressions and forms.[23]

The most important religious practices of Persians, like those of all Muslims in general, are of course the rites of prayers, fasting, pilgrimage and sacrifice, which while preserving their universal Islamic character have been colored in certain secondary aspects by the particular traits of Persian culture. The daily prayers, which most Shi'ites usually perform during three periods a day by connecting with a short pause

those of noon and afternoon as well as those of evening and night, punctuate the rhythm of daily life. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the conception of time and the flow of life itself are determined by these canonical prayers, which are considered as the major pillar of Islam. In addition the very devout perform the traditional Islamic supererogatory prayers (*nawāfil*) and there are special prayers connected with hope, fear, expectation, etc. and recitations of long Shi^{c}ite prayers such as *Du^{c}ā-i kumayl*.

Fasting as a religious rite is connected particularly with the holy month of Ramaḍān, although, again, many devout people fast on different occasions throughout the year, especially the beginning, the middle and the end of the lunar Islamic month. During Ramaḍān the rhythm of life changes and there is a perceptible transformation of the most external aspects of daily life. Many of the modernized Persians do not fast, but on the whole the fast is observed throughout the country. During the holy month, days become calm and somber and the evenings gay. Many more social calls are made to relatives during the evening, and at this time after the breaking of the fast religious and social life become completely intertwined.

The climax of the holy month comes during the nights of the 19th and 21st, the period during which the first Imam ^{c}Alī was struck on the head while praying in the mosque at Kufa and died of the wounds two days later. During these nights, all amusements and parties are halted and mourning is observed in both homes and mosques. The period culminates in the nights of the 19th to the 21st called the "nights of vigilance" (*aḥyā$^{\circ}$*) during which mosques are thronged until the morning hours. During the night of the 21st people often perform a hundred prostrations (*rak^{c}ah*) of prayer and chant litanies and supplications (especially the famous Shi^{c}ite prayer called *Jawshan-i kabīr*) until the rising of the sun.

Pilgrimage, as already pointed out, plays a major role in Persian religious life. The obligatory pilgrimage is, of course, that made to Mecca (*ḥajj*), wherein man crowns the religious performances of his life. Since making this pilgrimage requires

financial means and the ability to provide for one's family in advance, those who make the *ḥajj* (who are called *ḥajī* rather than *ḥajjī* in Persian pronunciation) are identified with a certain wealth and economic well-being. The *ḥajī* is respected by all devout people, but in the bazaar particularly, to be a *ḥajī* also confers social and economic advantages. And since all *ḥajīs* in the bazaar are not always beyond reproach in their economic dealings, some criticism of them can be sensed among the population at large. For many years, in fact, making the *ḥajj* had become rarer in the modern educated segment of Persian society. But this changed completely even in the decades preceding the Revolution and the annual *ḥajj* caravan began to include people from every walk of life. Since the Revolution an even greater number have been making the *ḥajj*.

The other places of pilgrimage, especially Najaf, Karbalaʾ, Samarraʾ, Kaẓimayn in Iraq, and Mashhad and Qum and many local *imāmzādahs* in Persia, have also always been of the greatest significance in daily religious life. These centers, as well as the smaller sites connected with different saints, bring the *barakah* of the center of Islam and of the Prophet to the outer territories. These centers are all echoes of the supreme center where Heaven and earth meet. There is hardly a Persian who does not make at least a few pilgrimages to a tomb of some saint with the continuous hope of being able to visit the more "central" ones whenever possible. Although some pilgrimages involve special hardship, the centers being located on mountaintops or places with an extreme climate, most pilgrimages combine religious asceticism with the enjoyment of God's bounties and the beauties of art and nature. For a large segment of the population, such a pilgrimage is the most enjoyable experience of the year, although it is also a time of the most intense purification, a period of prayer and asking for forgiveness that leaves its mark upon the person long after the pilgrimage has come to an end.

The *ḥajj* terminates with the feast of sacrifice (*ʿīd-i aḍḥā* or *ʿīd-i qurbān*) commemorating the sacrifice of Abraham. During this day, not only in Mecca but throughout the Islamic world,

sheep and other animals are sacrificed. Herds are marked with special colors and brought into the city before the occasion, and on the morning of the *ʿīd* the sacrifice is made, the meat being given to the poor and to neighbors. But besides this rite associated with *ʿīd-i qurbān*, sacrifice is made throughout the year. Firstly, all meat that used for daily food is slaughtered ritually and sacrificed, and secondly, on almost any joyous occasion, such as the arrival of a traveler from a long journey, the birth of a child (particularly a son), the arrival of an honored guest, and the building of a new house, sacrifices are made, usually sheep but sometimes of other lawful animals, including, occasionally, camels.

A religious practice that is particular to the Shiʿite world and especially important in Persia, is the *rawḍah*, which was developed in its present form during the Safavid period. The *rawḍah* (a word derived from the title of the work *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*, meaning the "Garden of Martyrs") consists of sessions during which sermons are delivered combined with the chanting of verses of the Quran and religious poems, with special emphasis on the tragedy of Karbalaʾ. These sessions are held most of all during the two-month period of Muḥarram and Ṣafar, revolving around the death of Ḥusayn and its aftermath. Much religious and moral preaching to the public takes place on these occasions. The *rawḍah* is held in mosques as well as in private homes. On the crucial dates of the ninth and tenth of Muḥarram on which the tragedy of Karbalaʾ itself occurred, there have always been even government-sponsored *rawḍah* throughout the country. The sessions are marked by sobbing and wailing, particularly on the part of women, as all discourse is brought back periodically to the theme of the death of the members of the household of the Prophet.

Religious practice also enters into daily life at the critical moments birth, marriage and death as in other parts of the Islamic world and, in fact, in other religions. At the moment of birth there is the simple recitation of the "testimony of Islam" or the *Shahādah* in the ear of the newborn child. In the case of boys, the rite of circumcision is as directly connected with reli-

gious practices as birth itself. As for marriage, although it is a contract and not a sacramental act, nevertheless, since it is made valid by virtue of the *Sharīᶜah*, it definitely has a religious connotation. The verses binding the contract are usually read by one of the *ᶜulamāᵓ* although any male Muslim can perform this and other functions of a priestly nature.

In Persia as elsewhere, it is naturally at the moment of death that religious rites become most vividly remembered and seriously practices. The acts of washing the body and burial are all performed in accordance with Islamic Law. Afterwards, a funeral service is held which usually men attend in a mosque and another where women gather in the home of the deceased or of one of his or her relatives. Sometimes the women also attend the service in the mosque sitting in a separate section. Since to attend those services is a social as well as religious duty and most men have many friends and relatives, attendance at funeral services in mosques is a regular event throughout one's life. Before the Revolution the sermon delivered after the chanting of the Noble Quran in funerals was one of the best means available to religious authorities to reach the higher strata of society, especially those who held political power in their hands. That is why a funeral service held for a member of the government or for a person of high reputation held a special significance in the religio-political life of Persia. In fact, several political assassinations and attempts toward this end have been made on such occasions during the modern history of Persia. After 1979 within the context of the radically changed situation, such sermons have lost much of their earlier political significance.

There is also a practice popular among women called preparing a *sufrah* which is a tablecloth spread on the ground full of all kinds of food, to which friends and neighbors are invited. During the "feast," a person specializing in performing the *rawḍah* called *rawḍahkhwān*, chants the Quran and religious poems and preaches religious themes. The women then partake of the food in a prayerful state and the rest of the food is then given to the poor and some taken to each participant's home

and given to friends and relatives, especially those who are ill, as an object possessing *barakah* (*tabarruk*). The *sufrah*, being especially for women, is usually connected with important events in the life of women in the household of the Prophet such as Fāṭimah and Zaynab. The whole process of preparing the "table," which is done with the greatest care and in the best taste, is considered as a religious labor, one in which the denial of the worldly is combined with the enjoyment of God's bounty.

The *sufrah*, as well as pilgrimage and many other religious acts, are often performed as a result of a vow and solemn promise to God (*nadhr*) in return for which the person asks something of God. The practice of *nadhr* is very popular in all segments of Persian society, especially among women. Women make a vow to pay so much money to the poor or set a *sufrah* if they bear a child or if their daughter finds a suitable mate. Students often vow to fast or perform a certain pilgrimage if they pass their examinations. Merchants in the bazaar make the *nadhr* to sacrifice so many sheep if their business transactions succeed. There is continuous "religious barter," in which Persians, like other traditional people, ask of God something in exchange for which they perform acts pleasing to Him. One can hardly understand the psychology of the Persian and the tensions of hope and fear within him without understanding his attitude toward *nadhr* and the "barter" he makes continuously with the Creator. Only the saintly man lives fully according to the Will of God without asking anything in return. But this highest spiritual attitude does not in any way invalidate the general exoteric religious forms and practice.

Besides religious practices that have been sanctioned and protected by the *ʿulamāʾ*, and represent the conscious, intellectual aspects of Islamic tradition, there are many popular practices which are often combined with the most intense religious fervor and enthusiasm. During the month of Muḥarram, long processions are organized by men who, dressed in black, celebrate the passion of Karbalaʾ by chanting religious poems and often beating themselves until they fall into a state of frenzy. Occasionally these practices are carried to extremes, some beat-

ing themselves with chains and even daggers and swords until they faint from loss of blood. This type of practice has usually received criticism from the religious authorities. Most processions, however, march through the streets of cities to the solemn rhythm of drumbeats and the harmony of human voices choking with grief. In larger cities, the sight of thousands of men and boys marching behind religious emblems and symbols of the family of the Prophet is a most moving religious experience.

There is also the passion play (*taᶜziyah*) which, although developed into an aristocratic art in Safavid and Qajar times, is essentially a popular religious manifestation. It is not usually encouraged by the *ᶜulamāᵓ* although most of them do not oppose it since it is a medium for profound religious expression. Varying from simple versions in the villages to elaborate ones in big cities, the *taᶜziyah* depicts the events that led to the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn at Karbalaᵓ. The climax is usually performed at high noon on the day of ᶜĀshūrā, the 10th of Muḥarram, when he was killed and was beheaded. In a city such as Qum, where tens of thousands of people of the city participate in the performance of the drama and thousands more flock from the countryside to join the local population in observing the *taᶜziyah*, one can observe one of the most overwhelming manifestations of religious life in Persia.

Finally, among popular religious phenomena one cannot overlook the interest in omens, magic and other occult arts. Islam, on the *Sharīᶜite* level, opposes the practice of magic, but that has not prevented people, especially women, from utilizing it often in combination with specifically Muslim practices. Furthermore, there is a complete traditional science of the "magic-like" use of Quranic phrases, that is, the recitation of formulae for appropriate occasions. Although this science is itself far from being "popular" in the usual sense, it has a widely extended field of application in daily life. There are also prayers (*duᶜā*) connected with the names of Imams and Sufi saints which people carry about with them or recite on various occasions. Besides their purely religious aspect, practices of this

kind have also acquired a kind of magical quality. The "prayer writer" (*duᶜā-niwīs*) like the practitioner of geomancy (*rammāl*), is a permanent fixture in the life of Persian women in both the city and the countryside. He combines strictly religious elements with all forms of fortune telling and both occult and pseudo-occult sciences.

The rhythm of life in Persia is determined by a number of holidays, many Islamic, some derived from ancient Persia and a few celebrating modern national events. Both the Islamic and the ancient Persian dates have a wholly religious aspect. Even the ancient Zoroastrian *naw-rūz* or "New Year," which marks the Persian new year to this day, acquired long ago a completely Islamic color. At the moment of the vernal equinox, people place the Quran on a special spread along with the seven objects beginning with the letter "s" (the *haft sīn* or seven s's) that have survived from Zoroastrian days. Prayers are also said and benedictions invoked upon the Prophet and his family.

As for the Islamic religious dates, the festivities of *aḍḥā* at the end of the *ḥajj*, *ᶜīd-i fiṭr* at the end of Ramaḍān, the date of the birth of the Prophet, the birthday of ᶜAlī and *ᶜīd-i ghadīr*, when according to Shiᶜite belief ᶜAlī was chosen by the Prophet as his successor, are widely celebrated as joyous occasions. Also of great importance is the date of birth of the Mahdī, when all cities are illuminated with countless lights.

The calendar is also dotted with tragic events, the most important being the 10th of Muḥarram, the death of Imam Ḥusayn, the 21st of Ramaḍān, the death of ᶜAlī, the 28th of Ṣafar, the death of the Prophet and second Imam Ḥasan, as well as the dates of the death of other Imams and of Fāṭimah. All these dates mark an intensification of religious life and a transformation of many aspects of daily life. The tragic elements in the Persian soul expresses itself at the highest levels during these occasions, which have the effect of cleansing the individual and society from the dross of religious negligence.

There exist in Persia today a number of schools and sects which from the point of view of Twelve-Imam Shiᶜism are marked by the emphasis upon certain aspects of Shiᶜite teach-

ings at the expense of other elements, and by their ensuing separation from the main community. Among these schools the Ismāʿīlīs are the oldest, being the remnant of the much larger Ismāʿīlī community of early mediaeval times. In religious beliefs they are close to the Twelve-Imam Shiʿites except on the question of the identity of the Imams after Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Theologically, of particular interest are the Shaykhīs, centered mostly in Kirman, and founded by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī two centuries ago. They emphasize the role of *taʾwīl*, or spiritual hermeneutics, and have a special reverence for the Imams. The ʿAlī-Allāhī and Ahl-i Ḥaqq have followers in Kurdistan, Mazandaran and some of the southern provinces. Some members of these sects even go to the extreme of believing in the divinity of ʿAlī and also in reincarnation.

The significance of these sects from the point of view of the general religious life of Persia is that most of them belittle the practice of the *Sharīʿah* and some do not even perform the daily prayers in the usual manner. In most cases they represent Sufi orders that have forgotten some of their original teachings and become politicized or have taken on an external social character resulting in the destruction of the equilibrium which characterizes the orthodox Islamic community, Sunnite and Shiʿite alike. They are nevertheless Islamic sects in that they stand still within the total matrix of the Islamic tradition. Such is not, however, the case with Babism and Bahaʾism, particularly the latter, which broke away completely from the structure of Islam and cannot in any way be considered as an Islamic movement or sect. The presence of Bahaʾism in Persia today, therefore, even limited in its membership, has had a role to play in the process of segmentation and destruction of the religious unity of the country. In addition to these groups there are of course several million Sunnis in Persia, mostly in Kurdistan and Baluchistan, the appreciation of whose presence is of importance for the comprehensive understanding of the life of Islam in that land.

In conclusion it must be noted that the Persian psyche possesses an elasticity that makes the study of religion in Persia

based on external forms alone difficult. From outward signs, one could observe before the Revolution the superimposition of a modern Westernized class, more or less torn away from religious practices, upon the traditional Persian society, nearly all aspects of whose life are dominated by the religious spirit. Even pre-Islamic norms have become, for those living the matrix of the traditional Persian world, totally Muslimized. But even among the modernized who outwardly seemed completely secularized there existed many traditional religious tendencies which in a people of less elastic mentality would not be conceivable. Before the Revolution one could often see women who dressed in the latest European fashions and who tried to act like Western women but who, at the same time, displayed a completely traditional religious attitude at moments of stress or sorrow or on religious occasions. Since the Revolution the Islamic dress code has been imposed in public but this type of person still survives in the country. Likewise, many men who presented a rationalistic front indifferent to religion would become totally transformed in holy places of pilgrimage or at moments of participation in religious ceremonies.

It can therefore be said that even before the Revolution most of the life of Persians were still dominated in its universal principles as well as in its daily acts by the spirit and form of the Islamic revelation, which also integrated into its worldview elements of older religions which were in conformity with its own principles.[24] Moreover, whereas certain domains of life had drawn away from the orbit of traditional religious life as a result of the advent of modernism, even in these domains religious elements and attitudes persisted. Of course in Persia, as in the Arab World, there were the few who had become torn away completely from Islam, at least outwardly, who possessed a worldview based upon imitation of various Western ideologies and who experienced constantly that tension between East and West alluded to in earlier chapters concerning Muslims in general. But for the vast majority of Persians, the religious truths by which they lived and died for centuries continued to dominate the horizon of their lives even if occasional clouds momen-

tarily obscured the horizon from some eyes. Such clouds, however, can never be permanent, and there was hardly anyone who during his lifetime did not gain some kind of vision of that horizon which has coordinated and oriented the lives of Persians, as of other Muslims, throughout the ages.

Despite the many changes brought about since the advent of the Islamic Revolution, these realities continue to abide. The new situation has brought with it a new dynamic both in the assertion of Islam and in the reactions by some including many among the youth to injunctions imposed by a government which rules in the name of Islam. But the deeper bonds of the relation between the soul of the Persians and Islam is a permanent one and is bound to continue and ultimately dominate the scene through whatever external changes Persian society undergoes in the current phase of its history.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. In fact, the error of modernized Arab Muslims, especially those affected by intense forms of nationalism, is in the other direction. It is in "nationalizing" Islam by seeing the Blessed Prophet solely as an Arab hero and Islam as a kind of product of the Arabic genius, forgetting the role of the Archangel Gabriel and the Origin of the Quranic revelation. This view of the Blessed Prophet as simply a "racial hero" of the Arabs is reflected in many modern biographical studies written not only by Arab Muslims but even by Arab Christians.

2. This essay deals with Islam in Persia before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Obviously many important changes have taken place as a result of that event with which this essay does not deal, but what is discussed here not only explains the background of the current scene but is still a reality in so many ways despite all the changes that have taken place.

3. For the contribution of the Persians to the purely religious sciences of Islam, see S. H. Nasr and M. Muṭahharī, "The Religious Sciences," Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. IV, Cambridge, The Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 464-480. As for Persian contributions to Islamic philosophy and the sciences see S. H. Nasr, "Philosophy and Cosmology," ibid. pp. 419-441 and "Life Sciences, Alchemy and Medicine," ibid., pp. 396-418; also Nasr, The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia. See also H. Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to *Shi*^{c}*ite* Iran. The most thorough discussion of the mutual influence and interplay of Islam, its civilization, and the Persians is to be found in the Persian work of M. Muṭahharī, *Khadamāt-i mutaqābil-i Islām wa Īrān*, Qum, Daftar-i intishārāt-i islāmī, 1984. See also S. H. Nasr, The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia.

4. We have chosen to discuss Islam in Persia in greater detail than when we discussed Islam in the Arab World in the last chapter because there are fewer studies of a serious nature concerning Islam in Persia in European languages than in the Arab world. Until the Islamic Revolution of 1979 most major Western studies of Islam, such as the well-known works of H. A. R. Gibb, W. S. Smith and K. Cragg, failed to include a chapter on Persia. As for after the Revolution, numerous works have appeared on Islam in Persia but nearly all dealing with current events rather than historical roots and enduring traditional patterns.

5. Of the nearly sixty-five million inhabitants of present-day Persia, about 98 percent are Muslim, the rest belonging to the Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish religious communities as well as to various branches of Babism and Baha'ism. Of the Islamic population, about nine-tenths are Shi'ite and one-tenth Sunni.

6. On the question of the "continuity" of Persian culture, see S. H. Nasr, The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 3-27; as well as Corbin, op. cit.

7. On the Iranian religions, see the still valuable work of G. Widengren, Die Religionen Irans, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1961 where a bibliography of major works on the subject up to 1960 can be found. For more recent accounts see W. Malandra, An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion, Minneapolis, Minnesota Publications in the Humanities, 1983; S. Shaked, From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam: Studies in Religious History and Intercultural Contacts, Brookfield (VT), Ashgate Publishing Co., 1995; and G. Gnoli, De Zoroastre à Mani, Paris, Travaux de l'Institut d'Etudes Iraniennes de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 11, 1985.

8. On the significance of Salmān for Persian Muslims, see the still valuable study of L. Massignon, Salmân Pâk et les prémises spirituelles de l'Islam iranien, Paris, Société des Etudes Iraniennes, 1934; English translation by J. M. Unvala, Salman Pak and the Spiritual Beginnings of Iranian Islam, Bombay, V. G. Moghe, 1955. On the significance of the Ahl al-bayt in Shi'ism see 'A. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite* Islam, ed. and trans. by S. H. Nasr, Albany (NY), The State University of New York Press, 1975. See also A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles, Tehran, World Organization of Islamic Services, 1984 (no author indicated).

9. On the rapport between Shi'ism and Sufism and the role played by Sufism during the post-Mongol period in the spread of Shi'ism, see M. Molé, "Les Kubrawiya entre Sunnisme et Shi'isme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'Hégire," Revue des Etudes Islamiques, XXIX, 1961, pp. 61-142. Also S. H. Nasr, Sufi Essays, Chap. VIII; and M. Mazzaoui, The Origin of the Safavids, Wiesbaden, F. Steiner, 1972.

10. For an example of the influence of Sufism on various facets of Persian culture, see N. Ardalan and L. Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture; and S. H. Nasr, "The Influence of Sufism on Traditional Persian Music," trans. by W. Chittick, in our Islamic Art and Spirituality, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 163-174.

11. For a discussion of Divine Omnipotence as related to the possibility of freedom of human action and evil in the world, see F. Schuon, Islam and the Perennial Philosophy, London, World of Islam Festival Publishing Co., 1976, especially chapter nine on theodicy.

12. We have dealt extensively with this doctrine in many of our writings, especially Science and Civilization in Islam. See also our Religion and the Order of Nature, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 60 ff.

13. Of course these elements, being aspects of the Islamic worldview in general, are also to be found in various forms and with different degrees of emphasis among other Muslim peoples. What perhaps characterizes traditional Persian culture in particular is its special concern with refinement and the expression of beauty in nearly every facet of life as the reflection of Divine Beauty, and its combining a special sense of the ephemeral character of the world with an intense sense of joy in life.

14. According to the well-known Arabic saying *lā takrār fi'l-tajallī*, "there is no repetition in theophany."

15. This tragic ethos is therefore spiritual and closely associated with the sense of nostalgia for man's celestial origin. Both spiritual attitudes, *ḥuzn* and *faraḥ*, are to be found in perfect complementarity and harmony in the Sufi poetry of such masters as Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī.

16. "Sanctity is a tree which grows between impossibility and a miracle." F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, p. 220. Yet the tree does grow and there have always appeared saints through the grace of Heaven. Their presence is, in fact, precisely a miracle which reveals the special, central position that man possesses in the order of universal existence, at once the farthest removed from the Origin and the only creature in the terrestrial environment who can achieve "union" with God and gain the state of sanctity.

17. For the relation of the mosque to the bazaar in traditional Persian cities, see Ardalan and Bakhtiar, op. cit.

18. A mujtahid in Shi'ism is one who can practice *ijtihād*, that is, give independent views on matters pertaining to Islamic Law.

19. The attempt to organize the *waqf* by establishing a governmental institution, even a ministry, to supervise it is not, of course, confined to Persia. The governments of most Islamic countries today have some kind of a department concerned with the organization and administration of *awqāf*. In Persia after the Revolution of 1979, the Department of *Awqāf* within the structure of the government was totally transformed and given greater power but of course under the

complete direction of religious authorities.

20. We have in mind the particular development that took place within the Ṣafī ᶜAlī Shāhī Order during the past century. It must be added, however, that most of the other orders were kept strictly away from any connection with Masonic lodges.

21. In such cases there is also always the danger of perversion and deviation from the authentic traditional perspective, in view of the kind of influence that can be found within Freemasonry in the West from the time of the so-called reforms which took place during the French Revolution and which made Freemasonry speculative, cutting it away from the operative practice of actual masonry and its basis in the crafts. It is important to add that following the Revolution of 1979, all activities associated with Freemasonry in Iran were banned.

22. Concerning Islamic philosophy in Persia, see S. H. Nasr, "The Tradition of Islamic Philosophy in Persia and its Significance for the Modern World," in The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, chapter 3, pp. 28 ff.; and H. Corbin, "The Force of Traditional Philosophy in Iran Today," Studies in Comparative Religion, Winter, 1968, pp. 12-26. Interest in Islamic philosophy has continued and in fact grown extensively since the 1979 Revolution.

23. There is also an opposite tendency among modernized Persians; it is to return to an appreciation of traditional art which, however, remains often superficial because of the lack of understanding of the spiritual principles responsible for the production of such an art. The traditional art continues, nevertheless, and many art forms such as calligraphy have seen a notable revival since the Islamic Revolution.

24. One of the main differences between the modernized Persian and the modernized Arab lies precisely in this domain, in that the force of modernism combined with extreme nationalism makes those Arabs affected by it look with a sense of pride towards all that is Arabic, including Islam, which is seen in this case as a purely Arabic "phenomenon," and with disdain towards the non-Arab Muslims, especially the Persians and the Turks. The same force make the Persian affected by them feel an intense tension within himself between his Islamic and pre-Islamic pàst, and, when the forces of Islam weaken within him, a disdain for the Arabs, even to the extent of wanting to "purify" the Persian language of the Arabic influences which enriched it so much and enabled it to become the universal language of Islamic culture throughout Asia for nearly a millennium.

Chapter 10

Decadence, Deviation and Renaissance, Their Meaning in the Context of Contemporary Islam

Having dealt with the present state of Islam in at least some parts of the Islamic world, it is now necessary to turn to more specific problems caused by the advent of modernism within the mind of those Muslims of various Islamic lands who, while modernized, still concern themselves with Islam and its history. In contrast to traditional Islamic scholarship, where in all branches of the sciences terms are clearly defined and always used with a specific meaning in mind, there has appeared during the past century among a large number of modernized Muslims dealing with their own tradition a tendency toward ambiguity and the careless use of many important terms, a tendency which reflects a confused state of mind and a lack of rigorous thinking to say the least. Words and expressions have been used by many of them in such a way as to betray the state of cultural shock and often sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the West from which they suffer. Their writings reveal most of all a slavery of the mind to the norms and judgments of modern and more recently even post-modern Western civilization. Moreover, these norms are usually hidden under the veil of an "Islam" of which there often remains little more than a name and certain emotional attachments, an Islam which has become devoid of the intellectual and spiritual truths

which stand at the heart of the Islamic revelation. In the present analysis, it is our aim to discuss three widely used expressions, namely "decadence," "deviation" and "renaissance," which are employed often in reference to Islamic history and to the present-day Islamic world, and which reflect in a profound fashion the attitude of a certain type of modernized Muslim toward the whole of Islam as a religion and as an historical reality.

Let us begin with the term "decadence," which appears very often in the writings of modern Muslim scholars, who continually refer to the condition of the Islamic world before the advent of modernism as one that could aptly be described as "decadent." This value judgment immediately raises the following question: "decadence with respect to what, or in respect to which norm?" There must be a norm by which something is measured and in relation to which it is judged to have decayed. Here, while some take the early centuries of Islam as a norm, most often it is the value-system adopted consciously or unconsciously from the modern West that provides, in a hidden and subtle manner, the norm and criterion for determining the state of decadence. This can be best illustrated by the question of science understood in its current Western sense. Many modernized Muslims, like so many other Orientals, equate science with civilization and judge the value of any human society and its culture by whether or not it has produced science, disregarding completely the lessons of the history of science itself.[1] Islamic civilization is then considered to have begun to decay when it ceased to produce outstanding scientists as the West understands the function of the scientist today. And even the date of this cessation of activity is taken by most Muslim writers from Western sources, where, until fairly recently, interest in all aspects of Islamic intellectual life was for the most part limited to the period when Islamic civilization influenced the West. As a result, everything in Islam from philosophy to mathematics suddenly "decays" mysteriously somewhere around the seventh/thirteenth century, exactly when the intellectual contact between Islam and the West came, for all practical purposes, to

an end.[2] Modern Muslim authors who hold this opinion do not even bother to do any research of their own or even to delve into the more recent and less-known research of those Western scholars who have shown how important Islamic astronomy was in the ninth/fifteenth century or how actively Islamic medicine was pursued in Persia and India until the twelfth/eighteenth century and in the Subcontinent even later to the present day.[3]

The result of this concept of decadence, which is based upon the modern Western criteria for "civilization" in its worldly aspect[4] rather than on the traditional Islamic perspective which looks upon the Medina community as the most perfect Islamic society—a society according to which all other Islamic "societies" are judged—has been to atrophy the minds of young Muslims and make them lose confidence in themselves and in their own culture. Rather than depicting the decadence which did take place in the Islamic world as a gradual and normal process of "aging" and of becoming ever farther removed in time from the celestial origin of the revelation, and without, moreover, emphasizing the very recent nature of this decadence, such authors posit the fantastic and abhorrent theory that the Islamic world began to decay in the seventh/ thirteenth century. They remain completely oblivious of the fact that if this had been the case, it would have been impossible for the Islamic world to survive as a living reality until now and for Islam to continue to nurture a vast civilization and remain a living force to this day. They brush aside such masterpieces of art as the Shah Mosque of Isfahan, the Blue Mosque of Istanbul, or the Taj Mahal, or the literary masterpieces of a Jāmī or a Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī, or the metaphysical and theological syntheses of a Mullā Ṣadrā or a Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, not to speak of the ever-living spiritual tradition of Islam contained within Sufism, which has continued to produce great saints to this day. Surely, had decadence, as envisaged by those modernized Muslim writers who have adopted completely Western norms of judgment, taken hold of the Islamic world at the early date so often posited by this group, there would have been no Islamic civilization

left for such a group to "revive" during the present century. Islamic civilization would have died out long ago and become only a subject of archaeological interest, as in fact so many orientalists would like to consider it.

As for the term "deviation," it is in fact rarely used by modernists, and it seen only in the writings of the more orthodox Muslim writers who are still aware of the presence of a spiritual and religious norm by which to judge any human society including their own, for to speak of "tradition" in the widest sense of the word *al-dīn* is also to speak of the possibility of deviation. In fact, in the place where this term should be used, namely in reference to modern Western civilization, which is itself a major deviation and anomaly, not to say "monstrosity" to use the words of R. Guénon,[5] the group of modern writers with whom we are concerned shy away from utilizing it, again precisely because they lack an objective norm with which to judge the temporal flux determining the specific conditions of time and space of any particular "world," a norm which must of necessity transcend this flux. This is all the more startling since traditional Islamic sources provide all the material that is necessary to discover such a norm and to formulate such a critique in a language comprehensible to contemporary man.

When we come to the word "renaissance," we find a profusion of the wildest uses of this term in nearly every context, ranging from art and literature to politics. The modernists never tire of speaking of nearly every form of activity in the Islamic world as a renaissance, whose Arabic translation, *al-nahḍah*, has become such a prevalent word in contemporary Arabic literature. There is something insidious about the carefree use of this word, for it recalls the Renaissance in the West when the re-birth of certain elements of Graeco-Roman paganism, deadly from the spiritual point of view, and not the positive elements of this ancient tradition which had already been integrated into Christianity by the Church Fathers, especially St. Augustine, dealt a staggering blow to Christian civilization and prevented it from reaching its natural period of flowering as a Christian civilization. One cannot but recall in connection with

the Renaissance the coming to life once again in the West of the Promethean and Titanesque spirit which stands at the very antipode of Islam.[6] What many Muslims today often take as renaissance is usually precisely the re-birth in one form or another of the very forces that Islam came to supplant, forces which are identified in the traditional Muslim imagery with the age of ignorance or *jāhiliyyah*. That is not to say that a form of "renaissance" in a particular domain is impossible, for the appearance of a great saint can cause a "renaissance" of spirituality in a particular region of the Islamic world.[7] A great master of Islamic art can revive a particular artistic form, or a powerful intellectual figure can cause the revival of some aspects of Islamic intellectual life, provided he is himself genuinely rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition.[8] But most of what is paraded as "renaissance" today is nothing of the kind. How often has a directly anti-Islamic form of thought been hailed by some Muslim writers as the "renaissance" of Islamic thought, or an activity directly opposed to the teachings of the *Sharīᶜah* as an Islamic social renaissance! Intellectual honesty would require us at least to avoid using the epithet "Islamic," even if the term "renaissance" must, for some reason, be employed. Here again, it is the lack of vision of the objective Islamic norms which causes many people entranced by the errors of the modern world to identify simply any change and activity in the Islamic world with an Islamic renaissance, in the same way that in the secular world of the West and its dependencies in other continents any change is equated with "progress" and "development," even if this change is in every way a debasement and diminution of the quality of human life.

In all these cases, the common error results from the loss of vision of the objective, transcendent and immutable Islamic principles which alone can enable one to judge from an Islamic point of view whether a particular form or activity or period of human society is decadent, deviated or resurgent with the characteristics of a true renaissance. Without the Absolute the relative can never be fully understood, and without the Immutable one cannot gauge the direction of flow of that which changes.

But because of a "metaphysical myopia" combined with a blind submission to the follies of the modern West, which has lost its vision of the Immutable, the group of modernized Muslims under discussion possess neither the intellectual vision to perceive the immutable essences of things, their *malakūt* in Quranic terminology, nor the binding faith to remain steadfast to the norm established by the prophetic tradition (*Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth*). Since the first of these ways of reaching the immutable principles of things is of an intellectual and spiritual order, it is brushed aside by the modernists of the type in question without too much popular opposition, and their energy is then concentrated on the subversion of normal faith in the immutable structure of traditional Islam, an undertaking which, because of its clearly religious colour, is bound to arouse greater opposition among believing Muslims. But in both cases the ultimate motive is the same. It is to remove the only objective Islamic criteria according to which one could judge present day Islamic society and in fact the modern world in general.

The desire to remove these objective and God-given criteria becomes, therefore, concentrated in the attempt to weaken, in the eyes of faithful Muslims, the trans-historical significance of the realities of Islam and more particularly of the prophetic *Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth* by subjecting them to the so-called method of "historical criticism," according to which the absence of the record of something is usually equated with the non-existence of the thing itself. The Blessed Prophet provides for Muslims, both individually and collectively, the perfect norm for their private and collective lives, the *uswatun ḥasanah* of the Noble Quran. As long as his *Sunnah* is respected and kept intact, there remains within the Islamic community a divinely appointed norm by which to judge human behavior and, along with the Holy Book itself, the means to provide the basis for the collective life of human society as well as for the inner religious life of its members.[9] The attack against the integrity of the *Ḥadīth* literature along with the authority of the traditional commentaries upon the Quran has as one of its major objectives, whether realized consciously or not, to remove the divine-

ly ordained criterion for judging Muslims and therefore to leave the door open for men to follow the line of least resistance before modernism and to surrender to their passions or to the transient fashions of the day, however demonic they may be. All of this is done, moreover, in the name of an "Islamic renaissance" and by criticizing as reactionary or decadent any group which refuses to imitate blindly the most vulgar products of Western civilization. The ambiguous and often wishy-washy judgments of many of the modernists with respect to Islam, past and present, is inseparable from the attempt to blur the clear example and norm for human life provided by the Quran and the *Sunnah*. And, conversely, many orthodox Muslims who have sought to defend the integrity of Islam have found it necessary to emphasize over and over again the significance of the prophetic norm as contained in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* along with the traditional commentaries, without which even the message of the Noble Quran would become, in many parts, incomprehensible to men.

It may now be asked, "Once this criticism has been made of the prevalent use of such terms as renaissance, decadence and deviation, what can these terms really signify if we accept the full authority of the Quran and the *Sunnah*, as well as the gradual unfolding of the tradition in stages to our own day?" To this question one can give a precise answer, which, however, because of the difference in premises and point of departure, will be very different from that given by the modernist group in question.

Renaissance in the Islamic sense can only mean a rebirth, or literally re-naissance, of Islamic principles and norms, and not just a rebirth of no matter what. Every sign of life is not a sign of spiritual life, and every activity that occurs among Muslim peoples is not necessarily an Islamic activity, especially during this age of the eclipse of so many aspects of the Truth. A renaissance in its Islamic sense would correspond to *tajdīd*, or renewal, which in its traditional context is identified with the function of a renewer or *majaddid*. Islamic history has been witness to many renaissances in the true sense of the word in the form of the activity of a *majaddid* in one part or another of

the Islamic world. But such a *majaddid* has always been the embodiment par excellence of the principles of Islam, which he has sought to re-instate and apply to a particular situation. He thus differs profoundly from the "reformer" in the modern sense,[10] who is usually a "deformer" because he is willing to sacrifice an aspect of the Islamic tradition for this or that contingent factor, most often made to appear irresistible by being called "an inescapable and unavoidable condition of the times." One wonders what would have happened to Islam during and after the Mongol invasion if such "reformers" had appeared and had tried to make Islam conform to what were then surely the most irresistible "conditions of the times," those connected with the victorious Mongols and their ways of life. A true Islamic renaissance is, then, not just the birth or re-birth of anything that happens to be fashionable at a particular moment of human history but the re-application of principles of a truly Islamic nature.

And here the primary condition for a genuine Islamic renaissance becomes clear. This condition in our day resides in independence from the influence of the modern West and from all that characterizes the modern world. A Muslim, were he to live far away from the influences of modernism, could possibly experience spiritual renewal while remaining oblivious to what is going on in the modern world. But a Muslim intellectual or religious leader who wishes to renew the intellectual and religious life of the Islamic world, now under such heavy pressure from the West and from modernism in general, cannot hope to bring about an Islamic renaissance on either the intellectual or the social level except through a profound criticism of modernism and of the modern world itself. To speak of an Islamic renaissance and at the same time to accept without any discrimination all that the modern world stands for is a pure chimera and the wildest of dreams, a dream which in the end cannot but turn into a nightmare. Today, truly Islamic activity, especially on the intellectual plane, cannot take place without a profoundly critical attitude towards the modern world, combined with a deep understanding of this world. Nor is the prac-

tice of giving opinion, or *ijtihād*, possible in the field of Islamic Law for a mind that has been transformed by the tenets of modernism. If, despite all the talk about an Islamic renaissance among Muslim modernists during the past century, no such thing has taken place—certainly not issuing from their quarter—it is precisely because they lack this absolutely necessary critical view and at the same time a profound knowledge of the modern world and the means to assess its transient values in the light of the eternal principles of Islam. It is certainly time for those who want to speak in the name of the Muslim intelligentsia and who wish to bring about a renaissance of Islam to stop speaking from a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the West and begin to apply the sword of metaphysical discrimination, contained in its purest form in the *shahādah*, to the modern world itself.

Within such a perspective, the meaning of decadence and deviation also becomes clear. Decadence is always a falling off from a perfect norm, but following a course that is still related to that norm, while deviation is a complete departure from that norm itself. Moreover, there are two forms of decadence, one passive and the other active: one which the traditional civilizations of the East have undergone during the past few centuries, and the other which has been followed by the modern West during the same period[11] and which, because of the active and dynamic quality of the West, became properly speaking a deviation. Many Orientals—Muslims as well as others—have mistaken this activity for true life precisely because they have seen it in contrast to the relative lack of dynamism and activity within the traditional Oriental world. Today, strangely enough, before the startled eyes of many modernized Easterners, this deviation of the West is itself turning into decadence of a form that is easily recognizable, even for them. It can, in fact, be said that the curve of life of modern Western civilization, beginning with the termination of its spiritual normalcy during the Middle Ages, has gone from "renaissance" to deviation to decadence, this last phase becoming ever more evident during the last few decades. As for the interpretation of Islam of the group

of modernists just mentioned, the curve can be described as going from decay to "renaissance" to deviation—a deviation which will surely be followed by another phase of decadence, but of a type different from that which the modernists sought to remedy to begin with. Fortunately, however, the Islamic tradition taken in its totality remains above this process.

There is only one way to escape the insidious chain of deviation leading to decadence. It is to remain faithful to the eternal and immutable principles of Islam, which stand above all becoming, and then to apply these principles to whatever situation with which Muslims are faced, to whichever "world" presents itself to them. To take any transient spatio-temporal set of conditions or "world" as the criterion of the validity of Islamic principles and teachings is to reverse the natural order of things. It is to put the cart before the horse; it is to make the contingent the criterion of judgment for the eternal. Its result can only be an unfolding similar to the fatal course pursued by the West, the end of which is the impasse which modern civilization now faces and which threatens the very existence of man on earth.

The Muslim "intelligentsia" cannot do anything better than to benefit from the lessons that can be drawn from a deeper study of the stages in the history of the modern West which have brought it to its present crisis. If they wish to speak for Islam and to renew its life, they must remember the extremely heavy responsibility they bear. It must be recalled that a true death is better than a false life, and that if one wishes to renew the life of the Islamic community it must be the renewal of a life whose roots are sunk deeply in the Divine. There is no way to avoid both decadence and deviation and to achieve a true renaissance but to re-apply the principles and truths contained in the Islamic revelation, which have always been valid and will always continue to be so. And in order to be able to apply these principles to the outside world, it is first of all necessary to apply them to oneself. Man must become spiritually revivified before being able to revive the world about him. The greatest lesson that all true reformers today can learn from the numer-

ous failures of even well-intentioned reformers in the modern world is that the real reform of the world begins with the reform of oneself. He who conquers himself conquers the world, and he in whom a renewal of the principles of Islam in their full amplitude has taken place has already taken the most fundamental step toward the "renaissance" of Islam itself, for only he who has become resurrected in the Truth can resurrect and revive the world about him, whatever the extent of that "world" might be according to the Will of Heaven.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. See S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, where we have dealt extensively with this question, especially in the Introduction, pp. 21 ff.

2. There were, of course, occasional contacts between the Ottomans and Europe, but they were of a completely different nature from the intellectual exchange which transformed the history of medieval Europe.

3. The situation for Islamic philosophy is even more startling, since Islamic philosophy and metaphysics have never really decayed at all. See S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, pp. 145 ff.; Nasr, "The Tradition of Islamic Philosophy in Persia and its Significance for the Modern World", in our The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, pp. 28-46; also Nasr, "Persia and the Destiny of Islamic Philosophy," Studies in Comparative Religion, Winter, 1972, pp. 31-42.

4. For Western man, especially after the seventeenth century, "civilization" became wholly identified with the purely human and in fact with the self-aggrandizement of terrestrial man which reaches its peak with Louis XIV. See F. Schuon, "Remarks on Some Kings of France," Studies in Comparative Religion, Winter, 1972, pp. 2 ff.

5. See the two fundamental works of Guénon on the modern world, Crisis of the Modern World and The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times. See also the masterly analysis of F. Schuon, Light on the Ancient Worlds.

6. Any Muslim whose taste in art has not been completely destroyed abhors the worldly nature of Renaissance and Baroque art and architecture, even of a religious kind. Now, this art which appears so worldly and unspiritual to the Muslim onlooker is only the reflection of the revolt against Heaven embedded in Renaissance humanism, which succeeded in destroying in the West the traditional concept of man as the *imago Dei*. On Renaissance Prometheanism see Nasr, Knowledge and the Sacred, chapter five, "Man, Pontifical and Promethean," pp. 160 ff.; and our Religion and the Order of Nature, chapter 5, "The Tragic Consequences of Humanism in the West," pp. 163 ff.

7. As an example of this kind of "renaissance" may be mentioned the appearance of the great Algerian Sufi Master, the Shaykh al-ʿAlawī, in North Africa at the beginning of this century. See M. Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century.

8. See H. Corbin, "The Force of Traditional Philosophy in Iran

Today."

9. On the significance of the prophetic *Ḥadīth* and for a reply to its modern critics, see S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, Chap. 3, pp. 57 ff.; and F. Schuon, Understanding Islam, Chap. 3, pp. 95 ff. See also S. M. Yusuf, An Essay on the Sunnah, Lahore, Institute of Islamic Culture, 1966; and M. Z. Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth* Literature, Calcutta, Calcutta University Press, 1961.

10. Usually called *muṣliḥ* (in its current and not traditional sense), that is literally he who reforms (*iṣlāḥ*), in contrast to him who renews (*tajdīd*) the tradition from within. See chapter 8 above.

11. "All civilizations have decayed; only they have decayed in different ways; the decay of the East is passive and that of the West is active.

"The fault of the East in decay is that it no longer thinks; the West in decay thinks too much and thinks wrongly.

"The East is sleeping over truths; the West lives in errors." F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, p. 22.

Chapter 11

The Western World and its Challenges to Islam

It is now necessary to turn to the specific challenges of an intellectual and spiritual order which the modern West has placed before the contemporary Muslim and to the role that the Islamic tradition can play in providing the means to answer these challenges. As already mentioned, it is in the nature of things in the present-day situation that if one wishes to discuss the challenges to Islam of the West and in fact of modern civilization in general, one must begin by using the sword of discrimination and by embarking on a kind "intellectual iconoclasm" to clear the ground of all the "idols" which clutter the contemporary scene. Modern civilization, whether in the West or in its over flow in the East, takes pride in having developed the critical mind and the power of objective criticism, whereas in reality it is, in a fundamental sense the least critical of all known civilizations and the one farthest removed from a true sense of discernment, for it does not possess the objective criteria to judge and criticize its own activities. It is a civilization which fails in every kind of basic reform because it cannot begin with the reform of itself.

There is a traditional Islamic saying according to which Satan hates sharp points and edges. This old adage contains a most profound truth, which applies directly to the present-day situation. The Devil, being everywhere manifests his influence

by dulling all sharp points and edges which are accessible to him, so that sharp distinctions disappear in the milieu dominated by his influence. The edges of doctrines become corroded and their sharp form gradually fades away. Truth and error become ever more confused, and even sacred rites and doctrinal formulations, which are the most precious gifts of God to man, become hazy and indefinite as a result of this corroding influence which makes everything appear indistinct and ambiguous. To discuss the challenge of the modern world to Islam requires, therefore, that this haze be dispelled through a rigorous application of intellectual discernment based ultimately upon the *Shahādah*, whose first stroke when written in Arabic is, in fact, in the form of a sword. This sword must be used to break the false idols of the new age of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), idols which so many Muslims accept without even bothering to question their nature. It must be used to cut away and remove all the false ideas and "isms" that clutter the mind of modernized Muslims. It must help to chisel the soul of the contemporary Muslim from an amorphous mass into a sharp crystal which glows in the Divine Light, for a crystal glows and glitters precisely because of its sharply defined edges.

It should never be forgotten that in the present situation any form of criticism of the modern world based upon metaphysical and religious principles is an act of charity in its profoundest sense and in accordance with the most central virtues of Islam. Also one should never forget—considering a certain attitude prevailing among some Muslims who are afraid of being critical for fear of seeming discourteous, or lacking in *adab* (which in the traditional Islamic languages means at once courtesy, correctness of manners, culture and literature)—that the Prophet of Islam (upon whom be peace) not only possessed *adab* in its most perfect form but also asserted the Truth in the most straightforward and naked manner. There were moments of his life when he was extremely categorical, and he never sacrificed the Truth for the sake of *adab*. Islam has never taught that one should accept that two and two make five in order to display *adab*. In fact, *adab* has always been the complement to the perception and assertion of the Truth in every situation and

circumstance. Once, an eminent spiritual authority from North Africa said, "Do you know what *adab* is? It is to sharpen your sword so that when you have to cut a limb it does not hurt." It is this type of attitude symbolically speaking that is needed by Muslims in their discussion of the West and its challenges to Islam. The Truth not only has a right to our lives and our beings but also has the prerogative to ask us to make sense to others and to express and expound it whenever and wherever possible. Today we need to be critical, in the Islamic and not Kantian sense, even to the degree of stringency, precisely because such an attitude is so rare and so much in demand.

What is lacking in the Islamic world today is a thorough examination and careful criticism of all that is happening in the modern world. Without such a criticism nothing serious can ever be done in confronting the West. All the statements of modernized Muslims which begin with the assertion, "The way to harmonize Islam and . . ."—whatever may follow the "and"—are bound to end in failure unless what follows is another divinely revealed and inspired worldview. Otherwise, attempts to harmonize Islam and Western socialism or Marxism or existentialism or evolution or anything else of the kind are doomed at the start by the very fact that they begin without exposing the system or "ism" under question to a thorough criticism in the light of Islamic criteria, and also because they consider Islam as a partial view of things to be complemented by some modern ideology rather than as a complete system and perspective in itself, whose very totality excludes the possibility of its becoming a mere adjective to modify some other noun which is taken almost unconsciously as central in place of Islam. The rapid change in fashions of the day which makes Islamic socialism popular one day and liberalism or some other Western "ism" the next is itself proof of the absurdity and shallowness of such an approach. He who understands the structure of Islam in its totality knows that it can never allow itself to become reduced to a mere modifier or contingency vis-à-vis a system of thought which remains independent of it or even hostile to it.

The defensive and apologetic attitude adopted by so many modernized Muslims towards various fashionable modes of

thought that issue from the West almost with the rapidity of seasonal changes is closely allied to their lack of a critical sense and of a discerning spirit. Usually, obvious shortcomings and that which is easy to criticize are criticized, but few have the courage to stand up and criticize the basic fallacies of our times. It is easy to point out that the life of students in traditional *madrasahs* is not hygienic, but it is much more difficult to take a firm stand and assert that much of what is taught in modern educational institutions is far more deadly—for the soul of the students—than the physically unhealthy surroundings of some of the old *madrasah* buildings. There are too few people in the Islamic world who can confront the modern world and criticize it and answer with the sword of the Intellect and the Spirit the very basis of the challenge with which the West confronts Islam. Such is the case today, but it does not have to be so. There is no logical reason why a new intellectual elite could not develop in the Islamic world, an elite which would be able to provide an objective criticism of the modern world from the point of view of the eternal verities contained within the message of the Islamic revelation, applying the God-given treasures of Islam to the wretched situation of modern man and the ever more serious plight he faces. A nucleus of such an elite has in fact been already formed and it is bound to grow in the future.

As already mentioned in previous chapters, there are today essentially two main classes of people in the Islamic world concerned with religious, intellectual and philosophical questions: the *ʿulamāʾ* and other religious and traditional authorities in general (including the Sufis), and the modernists still interested in religion. Only now is a third group gradually coming into being which is traditional like the *ʿulamāʾ* but also knows the modern world. As far as the *ʿulamāʾ* and other traditional spiritual authorities are concerned, it has already been shown that they usually do not possess a profound knowledge of the modern world and its problems and complexities. But they are the custodians of the Islamic tradition and its protectors, without whom the very continuity of the tradition would be endangered. They are usually criticized by the modernists for not knowing

European philosophy and science or the intricacies of modern economics and the like. But this criticism, which is again of the facile kind, is for the most part ill-directed. Those who possessed the financial and political power in the Islamic world during the past century rarely allowed the *madrasahs* to develop in the direction of making it possible for the *ʿulamāʾ* to gain a better knowledge of the modern world without becoming corrupted by it. In the few places where attempts were made to modify the *madrasah* curriculum, the hidden intention was more often to do away with the traditional educational system by deforming it beyond hope, rather than to really extending its programme to embrace courses which would acquaint the students with the modern world as seen in the light of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, few attempts have been made to create institutions which would provide a bridge between the traditional *madrasahs* and modern educational institutions and such attempts when made have rarely met with success except in smaller educational units and among a limited circle of scholars and students. In any case, the modernists have no right to criticize the *ʿulamāʾ* for a lack of knowledge of things which they never received the opportunity to master.

As for the second class, whose attitudes have been analyzed in previous chapters, they are the product of either Western universities or universities in the Islamic world which more or less ape the West. Now, universities in the Islamic world are themselves in a state of crisis which stems from the question of identity, for an educational system is organically related to the culture within whose matrix it functions. A jet plane can be made to land in the airport of no matter which country in Asia or Africa and be identified as part of that country. But an educational system cannot be simply imported; the fact that modern universities are facing a crisis in the Islamic world of a different nature from that which is found in the West is itself proof of this assertion. The crisis could not but exist because the indigenous Islamic culture is still alive. Moreover, this crisis affects deeply those who are educated in these universities and who are usually called the "intelligentsia." This term, like that

of "intellectual," is a most unfortunate one, in that often those so characterized are the farthest removed from the domain of the intellect in its true sense. But, by whatever name they are called, until recently most of those who were products of Western-oriented universities had one feature in common: a predilection for all things Western and a sense of inferiority relative to things Islamic. This sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the West among so many modernized Muslims, which is, moreover, shared by modernized Hindus, Buddhists and other Orientals in general who are affected by the psychosis of modern forms of idolatry, is the greatest malady facing the Islamic world, and afflicts most deeply the very group which one would expect to face the challenge of the West. The encounter of Islam with the West cannot therefore be discussed without taking into consideration that mentality which is in most cases the product of a modern university education,[1] a mentality which, during the past century, has been responsible for most of the apologetic Islamic works concerned with the encounter of Islam and the West.[2]

This apologetic, modernized approach to the crisis of the encounter of Islam and the West has tried to answer the challenge of the West by bending over backwards to show in one way or another that this or that element of Islam corresponds to just what is fashionable in the West today, while other elements, for which there could not be found a Western equivalent by even the greatest stretch of the imagination, have been simply brushed aside as unimportant or even extraneous later "accretions."[3] Endless arguments have been presented for the hygienic nature of the Islamic rites or the "egalitarian" character of the message of Islam, not because such things are true if seen in the larger context of the total Islamic message, but because hygiene and egalitarianism are currently accepted ideas and norms in the West although challenged by many marginal movements. By affirming such obvious and too-easily defensible characteristics, the apologists have evaded the whole challenge of the West, which threatens the heart of Islam and which no attempts to placate the enemy can avert. When

surgery is needed there must be a knife with which to remove the infected part. Also, when error threatens religious truth nothing can replace the sword of criticism and discernment. One cannot remove the negative effect of error by making peace with it and pretending to be its friend.

The apologetic attitude is even more pathetic when it concerns itself with philosophical and intellectual questions. When one reads some of the apologetic literature, which issued mostly from Egypt and the Indian subcontinent at the beginning of the twentieth century and which tried to emulate already very stale and dead debates between theology and science in Victorian England or in France of the same period, the weakness of such works, which were supposed to answer the challenge of the West, becomes completely evident even more so against the background of the decades that have since gone by. Of course at that time one could also hear the strong voice of the traditional authorities, who, basing themselves on the immutable principles of the Islamic revelation, tried to answer these challenges on a religious level, even if they were not aware of the more abstruse and hidden philosophical and scientific ideas involved. But this voice gradually diminished, without of course ceasing to exist altogether, while the other, that of the modernists, became ever more audible and invasive until the 1960's and 70's when traditional responses to the challenges of modernism began to appear to an even greater degree.

This phenomenon of feeble modernist responses in the East to the challenges of the West has led to the rather odd situation today in which, among the educated classes, practically the most ardent defenders of modern Western civilization in the world are Westernized Orientals. The most intelligent students at Oxford or Harvard are far less confident in the West and its future than those modernized Orientals who for some time have sacrificed everything at the altar of modernism and are now suddenly faced with the possibility of the total decomposition of their idol. Therefore, they try ever more desperately to cling to it. For the modernized Muslims, especially the more extreme among them, the "true meaning" of Islam has been for some

time now what the West has dictated. If evolution is in vogue, "true Islam" is evolutionary. If it is socialism that is the fashion of the day, the "real teachings" of Islam are based on socialism. Those acquainted with this mentality and the works it has produced are most aware of its docile, servile and passive nature. Even in the field of law, how often have completely non-Islamic and even anti-Islamic tenets been adopted with a *basmalah* added at the beginning and a *bihi nastaʿīn* at the end, while the substance of the material contained in between has been derived or even copied from some Western code?

Now suddenly this group, who were willing to sell their soul to emulate the West, see before their eyes the unbelievable sight of the floundering of the spiritual and ethical foundations of Western civilization itself. What a painful sight it must be for such men! Therefore they try, in the face of all evidence, to defend the Western "value system" and become ferociously angry with those Westerners who have themselves begun to criticize the modern world. Probably, if the obvious decomposition of modern civilization, which became gradually evident after the Second World War, had become manifest after the First World War, when the traditions of Asia were much more intact, a great deal more from these traditional civilizations could have been saved. But the hands of destiny had charted another course for mankind. Nevertheless, even in the present situation, there is a great deal that can be done, for as the Persian proverb says, "As long as the root of the plant is in water, there is still hope." On the plane of true activity, according to traditional principles, the possibility of doing something positive always exists, including the most obvious and central act of stating the truth, and acting accordingly.[4] Despair has no meaning where there is faith (*īmān*). Even today, if in the Islamic world there comes to be formed a true intelligentsia at once traditional and fully conversant with the modern world, the challenge of the West can be answered and the core of the Islamic tradition preserved from the paralysis which now threatens its body and limbs.

To realize exactly how much can still be saved in the Islamic

world, it is sufficient to remember that for the vast majority of Muslims even now, Islamic culture is still a living reality in which they live, breathe and die. From Indonesia to Morocco, for the overwhelming majority, Islamic culture must be referred to in the present tense and not as something of the past. Those who refer to it in the past tense belong to that very small but vocal minority which has ceased to live within the world of tradition and mistakes its own loss of center for the dislocation of the whole of Islamic society.

The tragedy of the situation resides, however, in the fact that it is precisely such a view of Islam as a thing of the past that is held by most of those who control the mass media in many countries in the Islamic world and who therefore exercise an influence upon the minds and souls of men far beyond what their number would justify. In many lands, those who control such means as radio, television and magazines live in a world in which Islamic culture, if not the Islamic religion itself, asspears as a thing of the past precisely because they are so infatuated with the West that no other way of seeing things than the Western one seems to have any reality for them, even if that other way be a still living reality existing on their very doorsteps.

Strangely enough this Westernized minority in the Islamic world has gained a position of ascendancy at the very moment when the West has lost its own moorings completely and does not know what it is doing or where it is going. If a simple Arab or Persian peasant were to be brought to one of the big Middle Eastern airports and asked to observe the Europeans entering the country, the contrast in nothing more than the dress, which varies from that of a nun to practically nude attire, would be sufficient to impress upon his simple mind the lack of homogeneity and harmony of the products of Western civilization. But even this elementary observation usually escapes the thoroughly Westernized Muslim, who, though usually well-meaning if nothing else, does not want to face the overt contradictions in the civilization he is trying so avidly to emulate.

Of course, despite the predominance and continuation of

this attitude in many circles the situation has changed somewhat during the past few decades. Muslims who went to Europe between the two world wars thought of the trees along the Seine or the Thames practically as *Shajarat al-ṭūbā* and these rivers as the streams of Paradise. Whether consciously or unconsciously most members of this generation of modernized Muslims transferred almost completely their image of paradise and its perfections to Western civilization. But today this homogeneity of reaction and blind acceptance of the West as an idol is no longer to be observed. The inner contradictions of the West that have become ever more manifest during the past few decades no longer permit such an attitude. The present-day generation of modernized Muslims is much less confident about the absolute value of Western civilization than were their fathers and uncles who went to the West before them. This in itself can be a positive tendency if it becomes the prelude to a positive and objective evaluation of modernism. But so far it has only added confusion to the ranks of modernized Muslims, and only here and there has it resulted in the appearance of a handful of Muslim scholars who have awakened to the reality of the situation and have ceased to emulate the West blindly. A number of scholars have also arisen from among the ranks of the Western style educated classes who have come to repudiate the West but mostly on the basis of emotional opposition rather than intellectual understanding. Alas! for the most part the main problem, which is the lack of a profound knowledge of the real nature of the modern world based upon the criteria of Islamic culture, remains. There are still too few "occidentalists" in the Islamic world who could perform for Islam the positive aspect of the function which "orientalists" have been performing for the West since the eighteenth century.[5]

Despite the weakening of the confidence in the West on the part of modernized Muslims, the Muslims are still on the receiving end in the realm of ideas, images and material objects. Lacking confidence in their own intellectual tradition, most modernized Muslims are like a *tabula rasa* waiting to receive some kind of impression from the West. Moreover, each part of the Islamic world receives a different kind of baggage of

ideas, depending on the part of the Western world to which it has become closely attached. For example, in the domain of sociology and also, as mentioned above, in philosophy, the Indian Subcontinent has closely followed English schools for the past century, and Persia has followed French schools.[6] But everywhere the modernized circles are sitting and waiting to adopt whatever comes along. One day it is positivism and the next structuralism followed by deconstructionism. Rarely does anyone bother to adopt a truly Islamic intellectual attitude which would act from an immutable center and in a positive manner with discernment toward all that the wind blows our way. The intellectual situation is as bad as the domain of women's fashion, where in many Islamic lands women remain completely passive as obedient consumers and emulate blindly whatever a few Western fashion-makers decide for them. In dress fashion as in philosophical and artistic fashion, modernized Muslims have no role to play at the source where decisions are made.

It is, of course, true that even Western people themselves are hardly aware of the deeper roots of the movements that sweep the West one after another, and that after the Second World War no one foresaw that such an extensive movement as that of the Hippies would become wide-spread in the West. Nor did anyone foretell the coming of post-modernism before its appearance upon the scene. But modernized Muslims are even farther removed from the current in that they are unaware not only of the roots but even of the stages of incubation and growth of such movements and wait until they occupy the center of the stage, and then react either with surprise or again in a state of blind surrender.

The environmental crisis is a perfect example of this state of affairs. Muslims waited until the crisis became the central concern of a vast number of Western people before even becoming aware of the presence of the problem. And even now, how many people in the Islamic World are thinking of this crucial problem in the light of the extremely rich tradition of Islam concerning nature which, in fact, could provide a key for the possible solution of this major crisis, were men to make use of it?[7]

To study in a more concrete fashion the challenges of the

West to Islam, it is necessary to take as example some of the "isms" which are fashionable in the modern world today and which have affected the cultural and even religious life of the Islamic world. Let us start with Marxism, or more generally speaking, socialism which was so popular until a decade ago and which now manifests itself in other forms.[8] In many parts of the Islamic world there was a great deal of talk until recently about Marxism, which, although it did not usually attack Islam directly at least not in the Arab World, had an important indirect effect upon religious life—not to speak of economic and social activity. Many who spoke of Marxism or socialism in general in the Islamic world did so with certain existing problems of society in mind for which they were seeking solutions. But very few of them actually knew Marxism or theoretical socialism in a serious sense. In spite of all the young Muslim students who spoke about Marxism in so many university circles, one wonders how many actually read Das Kapital, or even important secondary sources, or could defend the Marxist position seriously on a purely rational plane. The Marxist fad had become an excuse for many young Muslims to refuse to think seriously about the problems of Islamic society from the Islamic point of view and within the matrix of their own social situation. It was enough to accept the label of this black box with its unknown contents to have one's ego inflated and one's mind fall into the illusion that one had become an "intellectual" or a member of the liberated "intelligentsia," but an intelligentsia who, following the already established Marxist solutions to all kinds of problems thought out in a completely different sociocultural context in other lands, no longer had any responsibility to think in a fresh manner about the problems of Islamic society as an Islamic manner. It was precisely this blind following of Marxism as a package whose content was never analyzed, or as an aspirin to soothe every kind of pain, that prepared the ground for the worst kind of demagogy. Instead of discussing problems in a reasonable and meaningful manner, those who had fallen under the influence of what is loosely called Marxism developed a blind and unintelligent obedience which lead to a

senseless confrontation and finally a mental sclerosis resulting in untold harm to the youth of Islamic society—not to speak of its obvious harm to the life of faith.

Unfortunately, the response given by Islamic authorities to the challenge of dialectical materialism had for the most part consisted of arguments drawn from the transmitted (*naqlī*) or religious sciences rather than from the rich intellectual tradition of Islam contained in the traditional intellectual (*ʿaqlī*) sciences.[9] Now, religious arguments can be presented only to those who already possess faith. Of what use is it to cite a particular chapter of the Quran to refute an idea held by someone who does not accept the authority of the Quran to start with? Many of the works written by the *ʿulamāʾ* in this and similar fields can be criticized precisely because they address deaf ears and present arguments which have no efficacy in the context in question. They usually preach to the converted. This is especially saddening considering the fact that the Islamic tradition possesses such a richness and depth that it is perfectly capable of answering on the intellectual level any arguments drawn from modern European philosophy. In reality, what is all modern philosophy before traditional wisdom but a noise that would seek in its self-delusion to conquer Heaven? So many of the so-called problems of today are based on ill-posed questions and on ignorance of truths, and are of a nature which traditional wisdom alone can solve, a traditional wisdom found from ancient Babylonia to mediaeval China, and found, in one of its most universal and certainly most diversified forms in Islam and in the vast intellectual tradition which Islam has brought into being during its fourteen centuries of existence.

The danger of Marxism for Islam was the appearance in certain Islamic countries, especially within the Arab World and Iran, of a Marxism with an Islamic veneer, creating a most tempting trap for certain simple souls. This insidious use of religion, often with direct political aims in mind, is in fact more dangerous than anti-religious and at least "honest" Marxism, and corresponds to the thought and attitude of that class of men whom the Quran calls the *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites). In this case

also there is no way to give an Islamic response save to answer such pseudo-syntheses intellectually and to demonstrate clearly that Islam is not just anything at all provided a *basmalah* is added at the beginning, but a total vision of reality which cannot compromise with any half-truths whatsoever.

Another "ism" of great danger to Islam, one with a longer history of intrusion into the Islamic world than Marxism, is Darwinism or evolutionism in general, whose effect is particularly perceptible among the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent, obviously because of the strong British influence in education in that area. We have already had occasion to speak of the works of outstanding European biologists against evolution[10] and to allude to the proofs brought forth by some contemporary anthropologists to show that whatever may have occurred before, man himself has not evolved one iota since he first set foot upon the stage of terrestrial history.[11] But, unfortunately, few contemporary Muslim thinkers have taken note of these sources and made use of their arguments to support the traditional Islamic view of man. For a notable segment of modernized Muslims, evolution remains practically like a religious article of faith whose overt contradiction with the teachings of the Quran they fail to realize.

In fact, the Darwinian theory of evolution, which is metaphysically impossible and logically absurd, has been subtly woven in certain quarters into some aspects of Islamic thought dealing with the life and history of mankind to produce a most unfortunate and sometimes dangerous blend. We do not mean only the shallow Quranic commentators at the turn of the century, but have in mind even a thinker of the stature of Iqbal, who was influenced by both the Victorian concept of evolution and Nietzsche's idea of the superman. Iqbal is an influential contemporary figure of Islam but, with all due respect to him as a poet, his ideas should be studied in the light of the *ijtihād* which he himself preached so often. He should certainly not be put on a pedestal. If we analyze his thought carefully we see that he had an ambivalent attitude towards many things, including a love-hate relationship with Sufism. He admired Rūmī yet expressed dislike for a figure like Ḥāfiẓ. This is due to

the fact that he was drawn, on the one hand, by the Sufi, and more generally speaking Islamic, idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and on the other by the Nietzschean idea of the superman, two concepts which are, in fact, the very antipodes of each other. Iqbal made the great mistake of seeking to identify the two. He made this fatal error because, despite his deep understanding of certain aspects of Islam, he had come to take the prevalent idea of evolution too seriously. He demonstrates on a more literate and explicit level a tendency to be found among the many modern Muslim writers who, instead of answering the fallacies of the theory of evolution, have tried to bend over backwards in an apologetic manner to accept it and even to interpret Islamic teachings according to it.[12]

The general tendency among Muslims affected by the evolutionist mentality is to forget the whole Islamic conception of the march of time.[13] The later Quranic chapters about eschatological events and the latter days of mankind are forgotten or passed over in silence. All the *ḥadīths* pertaining to the last days and the appearance of the Mahdī are laid aside or malconstrued, either through ignorance or by ill intention. Just the one *ḥadīth* of the Prophet that asserts that the best generation of Muslims are those who are his contemporaries, then the generation after, then the following generation until the end of time, is sufficient to nullify, from the Islamic point of view, the idea of linear evolution of man and progress in human history. Those who think they are rendering a service to Islam by incorporating evolutionary ideas, as currently understood, into Islamic thought are, in fact, tumbling into a most dangerous pitfall and are surrendering Islam to one of modern man's most insidious pseudo-dogmas, one created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to enable men to forget God.

Moreover, accepting the evolutionary thesis brings into being overt paradoxes in daily life which cannot be easily resolved. If things are going to evolve for the better, then why bother to spend one's effort on improvement? Things are going to get better by themselves anyway. The very dynamism preached by modernists stands in opposition to the accepted idea of evolution as usually understood. Or, seen from another

point of view, it can be argued that if the effort, work, movement and the like preached in the modern world are effective, then man can influence his future and destiny. And if he can affect his future then he can also affect it for the worse, and there is no guarantee of an automatic progress and evolution to say the least. All of these and many other paradoxes are brushed aside in certain quarters because of an enfeebled intellectual attitude which has as yet to produce more than a handful of serious and widely known Islamic responses of a metaphysical and intellectual nature to the hypothesis of evolution. The challenge of evolutionary thought has been answered in contemporary Islam in nearly the same way as has the challenge of Marxism. There have been some religious replies based upon the Holy Book, but rarely an intellectual response which could also persuade the young Muslims whose faith in the Quran itself has been in part shaken by the very arguments of the evolutionary school.

Meanwhile, works of evolutionary writers, even of the nineteenth century such as Spencer, who are no longer taught as living philosophical influences in their own homeland, continue to be taught in universities in some parts of the Islamic world, especially in the Indian Subcontinent, as if they represented the latest proven scientific knowledge or the latest philosophical school of the West. Few bother even to study the recent anti-evolutionary developments in biology itself or the reassertion of the pre-evolutionary conception of man—views which are gaining ever greater adherence in many circles in the West itself today. And what is worse, there are too few efforts on the part of the Muslim intellectual elite to formulate from Islamic sources the genuine doctrine of the formation of life forms and especially of man and his relation to the universe which would act as a criterion for the judgment of any would-be theory of man and the cosmos, evolutionary or otherwise, and which would also provide the light necessary to distinguish scientific facts from mere hypotheses and scientific evidence from crass philosophical materialism parading in the dress of scientific fact or even religious belief.[14]

Another important "philosophical" challenge to the Islamic

world concerns the Freudian and Jungian interpretations of the psyche. The modern psychological and psychoanalytical point of view tries to reduce all the higher elements of man's being to the level of the psyche, and moreover to reduce the psyche itself to nothing more than that which can be studied through modern psychological and psychoanalytical methods. Until now, this way of thinking, in its scientific form, has not affected the Islamic world as directly as has evolutionism, and we do not know of any important and influential Muslim writers who are Freudian or Jungian, but its effect is certain to increase soon. It must therefore be remembered that Freudianism, as well as other modern Western schools of psychology and psychotherapy, are the by-products of a particular society very different from the Islamic. It needs to be recalled also that Freud was a Viennese Jew who turned away from Orthodox Judaism. Few people know that he was connected to a messianic movement which was opposed by the Orthodox Jewish community of Central Europe itself, and that therefore he rejected the reality of God and was opposed to the mainstream of Jewish life, not to speak of Christianity. Many study Freudianism but few delve into its deeper origins which reveal its real nature.[15]

Some years ago one of the well-known figures of Sufism from the East wrote a series of articles on Sufism and psychoanalysis in French, making a comparison between the two. With all due respect to him it must be said that he has been too polite and lenient towards psychoanalysis, which is truly a parody of the initiatic methods of Sufism. Fortunately for Muslims, until now the influence of psychoanalysis has not penetrated deeply among them, nor have they felt the need for it. This is due most of all to the continuation of the practice of religious rites such as the daily prayers and pilgrimage as well as the practices of Sufism. The supplications, "discourses" and forms of pleading that are carried out in religious centers by men, women and children open the soul to the influx of Divine Grace and are a most powerful means of curing the soul's ailments and untying its knots. These forms of prayer achieve a goal which the psychoanalyst seeks to accomplish without success

and moreover often with dangerous results, for he lacks the power which comes from the Spirit and which alone can dominate and heal the soul.

But psychoanalytical thought, which is agnostic or even in certain cases demonic, is bound to penetrate more into the Islamic world, probably mostly through the translation of Western literature into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and other Islamic languages and through the practice of those trained in these psychoanalytical methods. The effect of such translations and practices will be to bring into being, and in fact has already brought into being, a so-called "psychological literature" opposed to the very nature and genius of Islam. Islam is a religion which rejects individualistic subjectivism. The most central architectural symbol of Islam, the mosque, is a building with a space in which all elements of subjectivism have been eliminated. It is an objective determination of the Truth, a crystal through which radiates the light of the Spirit. The spiritual ideal of Islam itself is to transform the soul of the Muslim, like a mosque, into a crystal reflecting the Divine Light.

Truly Islamic literature is very different from the kind of subjective literature we find in the writings of Franz Kafka or at best in Dostoevsky. These and similar writers are, of course, among the most important in modern Western literature, but they, along with most other modern Western literary figures, nevertheless present a point of view which is very different from, and usually totally opposed to, that of Islam. Among older Western literary figures who are close to the Islamic perspective, one might mention first of all Dante and Shakespeare who, although profoundly Christian, are in many ways like Muslim writers. In modern times, one could mention, on of course another level, T. S. Eliot, who, unlike most modern writers, was a devout Christian and possessed, for this very reason, a vision of the world not completely removed from that of Islam.

In contrast to the works of such men, however, the psychological novel, through its very form and its attempt to penetrate into the psyche of men without possessing any criterion with which to discern Truth as an objective reality, is an element

that is foreign to Islam. Marcel Proust was, without doubt, a master of the French language and his In Search of Time Past is of much interest for those devoted to modern French literature, but this type of writing cannot under any conditions become the model for a genuinely Islamic literature. Yet it is this very type of psychological literature that is now beginning to serve as a "source of inspiration" for a number of writers in Arabic and Persian. It is of interest to note that the most famous modern literary figure of Persia, Sadeq Hedayat, who was deeply influenced by Kafka, committed suicide because of psychological despair and that, although certainly a person of great literary talent, he was divorced from the Islamic current of life. Today, in fact, his ideas are opposed by Islamic elements within Persian society. Nevertheless, such writers, who often deal with psychological problems and disturbances found in Western society, problems which the Muslims have not experienced in the same way until now, are becoming popular among the Muslim youth who thereby become acquainted, and even inflicted, with the malady of seeing the world through the spectrum of a psychological agnosticism.

One of the worst tragedies today in the Muslim world is that there has appeared recently a new type of person who tries consciously to imitate the obvious maladies of the West. Such people, for example, are not really in a state of depression but try to put themselves into one in order to look modern. They compose poetry that is supposed to issue from a tormented and depressed soul whereas they are not tormented at all. There is nothing worse than a state of nihilism except its imitation by someone who is not nihilistic but tries to produce nihilistic literature or art only to imitate the decadence of Western art. The influence of psychology and psychoanalysis, combined with an atheistic and nihilistic point of view and disseminated within the Islamic world through literature and art, presents a major challenge to Islam which can be answered only through recourse to traditional Islamic psychology and psychotherapy contained mostly within Sufism, and also through the creation of a genuinely Islamic literary criticism which would be able to

provide an objective evaluation of so much that passes for literature today.

The degree of penetration of anti-Islamic psychological as well as philosophical Western ideas through literature into the Islamic World can be best gauged by just walking through the streets near universities in various Middle Eastern cities. Among the books spread on the ground or on stands everywhere one still observes traditional religious books, especially of course the Quran. But one observes also a larger number of works in Islamic languages dealing with subjects ranging all the way from socialism and existentialism to works of Western pop culture, presented usually as "literature." There are, of course, rebuttals and answers as well, for Islam and its spirituality are still alive. But the very presence of all this writing itself reveals the magnitude of the challenge.

As far as nihilism is concerned, the Islamic answer is particularly strong and, putting pretenders aside, the Muslims, even the modernized ones, have not experienced nihilism in the same way as have modernized Westerners, for whom nihilism has become an experience of almost central importance. The main reason for this is first of all that in Christianity the Spirit has been almost always presented in a positive form, as an affirmation, as the sacred art of Christianity reveals so clearly. The void or the *nihil* has not usually been given a spiritual significance in Christian theology and art, as it has been for example in Islam and also in the Far East.[16] Secondly, as a result of the rebellion against Christianity, modern man has come to experience the *nihil* only in its negative and terrifying aspect, while some have been attracted to Oriental doctrines especially because of the latter's emphasis upon the Void.

In contrast to Christianity, where the manifestation of the Spirit is identified always with an affirmation and a positive form, Islamic art makes use of the "negative" or the "Void" itself in a spiritual and positive sense in the same way that metaphysically the first part of the *Shahādah* begins with a negation to affirm the vacuity of things vis-à-vis Allah. The space in Islamic architecture is essentially a "negative space." Space in

Islamic architecture and city-planning is not the space around an object or determined by that object. Rather, it is the negative space cut out from material forms, as for example in traditional bazaars. When one walks through a bazaar, one walks through a continuous space determined by the inner surface of the wall surrounding it, and not by some object in the middle of it. That is why what is happening architecturally in many Middle Eastern cities such as the building of a large monument in the middle of a square to emulate what one finds in the West is the negation of the very principles of Islamic art and is based on a lack of understanding of the positive role of negative space and the *nihil* in Islamic architecture.

To return to the question of psychology and psychoanalysis, it must be added that the presence of this perspective in so much art criticism in the West has permitted this kind of thinking to seep into the mind of a small but significant portion of Islamic society through art as well as literature—significant because it wields influence and often forms the taste of the psychologically passive masses of traditional Muslims. Traditional Islamic literary tastes are thereby being influenced by the completely anti-traditional ideas emanating from Jungian and Freudian circles and threatening one of the most central and accessible channels of Islamic norms and values. It might, furthermore, be added that, as already mentioned, Jungian psychology is more dangerous than Freudian in this respect in that it appears to be dealing with the sacred and the noumenal world whereas in reality it is deforming the image of the sacred by confusing the spiritual and the psychological domains and subverting the luminous and transcendent source of archetypes into a collective unconscious which is no more than the dumping ground for the collective psyche of various peoples and their cultures. Islamic metaphysics, like all true metaphysics, stands totally opposed to this blasphemous subversion as well as to the methods of profane psychoanalysis which are, as already stated, no more than a parody of Sufi techniques. But how many contemporary Muslims are willing to stand up and assert their basic differences rather than try to glide over them in order to

placate the modern world with all its fundamental errors and subsequent evils?

Another challenge to Islam which came to the fore only since the Second World War was the whole series of movements of thought and attitudes loosely bound together under the title of existentialism, which was one of the latest waves of Western thought to reach the Muslims following various forms of positivism. There are of course many branches of existentialism, ranging from the Existenz Philosophie of the German philosophers to the theistic philosophy of Gabriel Marcel and finally to the agnostic and atheistic ideas of Sartre and his followers. This type of philosophy, which developed on the European continent early in this century, is still of some importance in continental Europe. Although existentialism and various post-modern philosophies which have followed upon its wake have not, as yet, had a serious effect upon the Muslim world, during the past few decades their influence, which can be characterized categorically as negative, has made itself felt, again through art, and more directly through philosophical works as such, which have come to influence some Muslims concerned with philosophy and the intellectual life. Because of the anti-metaphysical attitude of much of what is taught in this school and the fact that it has forgotten the meaning of Being in its traditional sense, which lies at the heart of all Islamic philosophy, the spread of existentialism, especially in its agnostic vein, an insidious danger for Islamic intellectual life.

Furthermore, there is the tendency in certain quarters to interpret Islamic philosophy itself in the light of Western modes of thought, the latest being the phenomenological and existential schools. Muslim "intellectuals" are directly to blame for this dangerous innovation (*bidᶜah*), which, strangely enough, is also the most blind and unintelligent type of imitation (*taqlīd*). If this type of interpretation continues it will cost the new generation of Muslims very dearly. Today, one sees everywhere in various Muslim countries people learning about their own intellectual and philosophical past from Western sources, many of which may contain useful information and may be of value from

the point of view of scholarship, but nearly all of which are of necessity written from a non-Muslim point of view. In the field of thought and philosophy in its vastest sense the countries that have suffered most are those which use English or French as media of instruction in their universities: countries such as Pakistan, the Muslim sectors of India, Malaysia and Nigeria, or the Islamic Maghrib such as Morocco and Tunisia. It is certainly long overdue, with all this talk of anti-colonialism, for Muslims to overcome the worst type of colonialism possible—the colonialism of the mind—and to seek to see and study their own culture, especially its intellectual and spiritual heart, from their own point of view. Even if, God forbid, there are certain Muslims who want to reject some aspect of their intellectual heritage, they would first of all have to know that heritage. Both acceptance and rejection of anything must be based upon knowledge, and there is no excuse for ignorance, no matter what direction one wishes to follow. One cannot reject what one does not know any more than one can accept something in depth without true knowledge. Nor can one throw away what one does not possess. This is a very simple truth, but one that is too often forgotten today.

Some years ago a famous Zen master visited a leading Western university. After his lecture on Zen, a graduate student asked, "Don't the Zen masters believe that one should burn the Buddhist scrolls and throw away the Buddha images?" The master smiled and answered, "Yes, but you can only burn a scroll which you possess and throw away an image which you have." This was a most profound answer. The master meant that you can only transcend the exoteric dimension of religion if you practice that exoterism and subsequently penetrate into its inner meaning and transcend its forms. He who does not practice exoterism cannot ever hope to go beyond it; he merely falls below it and mistakes this fall for a transcending of forms. The same applies on another level to man's traditional intellectual heritage. One cannot go "beyond" the formulations of the sages of old when one does not even understand them. He who tries to do so mistakes his pitiful ignorance and "expansion" and

apparent "freedom" from traditional norms of thought, an ignorance which is in reality the worst kind of imprisonment within the limitations of one's own nature, for the true freedom which comes solely from the illimitable horizons of the world of the Spirit and which can be reached only through the vehicle provided by religion and its sapiential doctrines.

Contemporary Muslims should be realist enough to understand that they must begin their journey, in whatever direction they wish to go, from where they are. A well-known Chinese proverb asserts that "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Now this first step must of necessity take place from where one is located, and that is as much true culturally and spiritually as it is physically. Wherever the Islamic world is to "go," it must begin from the reality of the Islamic tradition and from its own real, and not imagined, situation. Those who lose sight of this fact actually do not travel effectively at all. They just imagine that they are journeying. A Pakistani or a Persian or an Arab "intellectual" who wants to be a leader of thought for the Muslim people must remember who he is, if he wishes to be effective and not be cut off from the rest of Islamic society. No matter how hard he tries to make a corner of Lahore or Tehran or Cairo belong to the setting of Oxford or the Sorbonne, he will not succeed. The so-called Muslim intellectuals of the Westernized kind who complain that they are not understood and appreciated by Islamic society forget that it is they who have refused to appreciate and understand their own culture and society and are therefore rejected by their own community. This rejection is, in fact, a sign of life, an indication that Islamic culture still possesses vitality.

As far as philosophy is concerned, the countries where Islamic languages are used for university instruction are in a somewhat better position, especially Persia, where Islamic philosophy still continues as a living tradition and where it is not easy to say anything at all in the name of philosophy without being seriously challenged by the traditional intellectual elite. But of course even this part of the Muslim world has not been completely spared from condescending and apologetic studies of

Islamic thought from the point of view of Western philosophy, though relatively speaking there is less Western philosophic influence there because of the two reasons alluded to above: the language barrier and a still-living tradition of Islamic philosophy. It would be interesting in this connection to compare the effect of the publication in Pakistan of Iqbal's two philosophical works in English, The Development of Metaphysics in Persia and The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, with the effect of their publication in Persia in their Persian translations into.

Yet even in lands using Islamic languages books do appear in languages such as Persian, and particularly Arabic, on philosophy from a perspective alien to that of Islam and bearing such titles as *Falsafatunā*, *Our Philosophy*, as if philosophy as a vision of the Truth or quest after wisdom or sophia could ever be "mine" or "ours."[17] No Arab or Persian traditional philosopher ever used such an expression. For Muslims who have cultivated Islamic philosophy, philosophy has always been *al-falsafah* or *al-ḥikmah*, "the philosophy," a vision of the truth transcending the individualistic order and derived from the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) itself. The very appearance of such concepts and terms as "our philosophy" or "my thought" in Islamic languages itself reveals the degree of departure from the traditional Islamic norm. It is against such errors that the weapon of the traditional doctrines contained in the vast treasury of Islamic thought must be used, and answers drawn from these sources be provided, before any further erosion of Islamic intellectual life takes place.

Returning to the question of existentialism and traditional Islamic philosophy in Persia, it must be mentioned that because of the kind of traditional philosophy surviving there, based on the principiality of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), and itself called *falsafat al-wujūd* (which some have mistakenly translated as "existentialism"), existentialism of the European kind has encountered strong resistance from traditional circles. Actually anyone who has studied traditional Islamic philosophy from Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī to the great expositor of the metaphysics

of being, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), will readily understand the profound chasm which separates the traditional Islamic "philosophy of being" from modern existentialism, which, even in its apparently most profound aspects, can only reach, in a fragmentary fashion, some of the rudimentary teachings contained in their fullness in traditional metaphysics. Henry Corbin, the only Western scholar who has expounded to any extent this later phase of Islamic philosophy in the West, has shown the divergence of views between Islamic philosophy and existentialism and the correctives which the former provides for the latter, in the long French introduction to his edition and translation of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī's *Kitāb al-mashāᶜir* (rendered into French as Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques).[18] It is incidentally interesting to note that it was through Corbin's translation of Heidegger's Sein und Zeit that Sartre was first attracted to existentialism, while Corbin himself turned away from this form of thought to the ocean of the "Orient of Light" of Suhrawardī and the luminous philosophy of being of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī.

One last but urgent and basic problem must be mentioned, and that is the environmental crisis, which was brought into being by modern civilization but which is now a challenge to the very life of men everywhere, including, of course, Muslims in the Islamic world. Anyone who is aware of the situation of the modern world knows that the most immediate problem, at least of a material order, which faces the world is the environmental crisis, the destruction of the equilibrium between man and his natural environment. Islam and its sciences have a particularly urgent and timely message which, as mentioned above, can help to solve, to the extent possible, this major challenge to the world as a whole. However, this message has unfortunately received little attention from modernized Muslims themselves until quite recently.

We know that Muslims cultivated avidly the sciences of nature, such as astronomy, physics and medicine, and made great contributions to them without losing their equilibrium and their harmony with nature. Their sciences of nature were

always cultivated within the matrix of a "philosophy of nature" which was in harmony with the total structure of the universe as seen from the Islamic perspective. There lies in the background of Islamic science a true philosophy of nature which, if brought to light and presented in contemporary language, can be substituted for the present false natural philosophy. For it is this latter philosophy which, combined with a lack of true metaphysical understanding of first principles, is largely responsible for the present crisis in man's relation with nature.[19]

Unfortunately, the Islamic scientific heritage has only too rarely been studied by Muslims themselves, and when such a study has been made, it has usually been based again on a sense of inferiority which has impelled the authors to try to prove that Muslims preceded the West in scientific discoveries and therefore are not behind the West in their cultural attainment. Rarely is this precious Muslim scientific heritage seen as an alternative path, a science of the natural order which could and did avoid the catastrophic impasse which modern science and its applications through technology have created for men. Muslims with vision should be only too happy that it was not they who brought about the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution whose logical outcome we see today. Muslim scholars and thinkers must be trained to revitalize the philosophy of nature contained in the Islamic sciences and to study these sciences themselves.

The end thus proposed is very different from the goal of so many modernized Muslims who pride themselves upon Islam having paved the way for the Renaissance. They reason that since the Renaissance was a great event in history and since Islamic culture helped create the Renaissance, therefore Islamic culture must be of value. This is an absurd way of reasoning, which completely ignores the fact that what the modern world suffers from today is precisely the result of steps taken by the West, mostly during the Renaissance, when Western man rebelled to a large extent against his God-given religion.

Muslims should be grateful that they did not rebel against Heaven and had no share in that anti-spiritual humanism

which has now resulted in an infra-human world. What Islam in fact did was to prevent the individualistic rebellion against Heaven, the manifestations of the Promethean and Titanesque spirit which is so clearly shown in much of Renaissance art and which stands diametrically opposed to the spirit of Islam, which is based on submission to God. It is true that Islamic science and culture were a factor in the rise of the Renaissance in the West, but Islamic elements were employed only after they were divorced from their Islamic character and torn away from the total order in which alone they possess their full meaning and significance.

Muslims should revivify the study of the Islamic sciences, first in order to demonstrate to young Muslims, so many of whom have had the tendency to stop praying upon learning the first formulae of algebra, the fact that for many centuries Muslims cultivated the sciences, including most of the mathematics taught in secondary schools today, and yet remained devout Muslims; and second, to bring out the underlying harmony of the Islamic sciences with God and the natural and human orders, with Islamic philosophy, theology and metaphysics, a harmony that is closely related to the philosophy of nature alluded to above. The great masterpieces of Islamic science, such as the works of Ibn Sīnā, al-Bīrūnī, Khayyām and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, can all be employed with both ends in view.

To conclude, it must be asserted categorically once again that to preserve Islam and Islamic civilization, a conscious and intellectual defense must be made of the Islamic tradition. Moreover, a thorough intellectual criticism must be made of the modern world and its shortcomings. Muslims cannot hope to follow the same path as the West without reaching the same impasse or an even worse one, because of the rapidity of the tempo of change today. The Muslim intelligentsia must face all the challenges mentioned here, and many others, with confidence in themselves. They must cease to live in the state of a psychological and cultural sense of inferiority. They must close ranks among themselves and also join forces with the other great traditions of Asia not only to cease to be on the defensive

but also to take the offensive and provide from their God-given treasury of wisdom the medicine which alone can cure the modern world of its most dangerous malady and save it from its present-day plight, provided of course that the patient is willing to undergo the necessary cure. But even if we take the most pessimistic point of view concerning the present-day situation and believe that nothing can be saved, the assertion of the truth itself is the most valuable of all acts, and its effect goes far beyond what can usually be envisaged. The truth must therefore be asserted and the intellectual defense of Islam made on every front on which it is challenged. The result is in God's Hands. As the Quran asserts, "Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished away. Lo! falsehood is ever bound to vanish." 17:81 (Pickthall translation).

NOTES ON CHAPTER 11

1. It must be said, however, that because of the very rapid decadence of Western society during the past few decades, some of the younger Muslims who have experienced the Western world on an "intellectual" level are far less infatuated with it than before and have in fact begun to criticize it. But of this group the number that think within the Islamic framework is relatively limited except perhaps in Iran where, since 1979 in many universities, the question of an Islamic critique of modern Western thought has come to the fore. In other Islamic countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia students with an Islamic framework who criticize modernism also exist but on a smaller scale. A number of Islamic universities have been established in several Islamic countries, but they are still at the growing stage and have not as yet produced any earth-shaking intellectual critiques of modernism on the philosophical plane although they have produced a number of notable works in the domains of Islamic Law, sociology, and economics. Most of the reaction against modernism is emotional and political rather than intellectual. The various works of Maryam Jameelah contain many thoughtful pages on this theme and the whole problem of the confrontation of Islam and Western civilization. See especially her Islam Versus the West, Lahore, Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1968.

2. A few of the modernized *ʿulamāʾ* must also be placed in this category. See W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, where the style and approach of such an apologetic attitude, especially as it concerns Egypt, is analyzed.

3. It is here that "fundamentalist" puritanical movements such as that of the Salafiyyah and the modernist trends meet.

4. See F. Schuon, "No Activity without Truth," Studies in Comparative Religion, Autumn, 1969, pp. 194-203; also The Sword of Gnosis, pp. 27 ff.

5. We do not mean that Muslim "Occidentalists" should emulate the prejudices and limitations of the Orientalists, but that they should know the West as well as possible from the Islamic point of view in the same way that the best among Orientalists have sought to know the East well, albeit within the frame of reference of the West. Of course, because of the anti-traditional nature of the modern West, such a frame of reference has not been adequate when dealing with the religious and metaphysical teachings of Oriental traditions, but that is another question, which does not concern the present comparison.

6. See S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, Chap. 12.

7. See S. H. Nasr, Man and Nature, pp. 93 ff. While we wrote this book which predicted the environmental crisis (then called the ecological) in 1966, literature on the subjects written by other Muslims did not appear to any appreciable scale until the 1990's. On this issue see also our Religion and the Order of Nature.

8. As far as socialism in its non-Marxist form is concerned, which is now still enjoying some popularity in the from of "Islamic socialism," "Arab socialism" etc., after the fall of Communism, it is usually a misnomer for social justice and was adopted in many circles, without an analysis of its real meaning, for political expedience or simply to appear modern and progressive. See A. K. Brohi, Islam in the Modern World, Lahore, United Publishers, 1975.

9. A major exception to this is the five-volume *Uṣūl-i falsafah* of ʿAllamah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, one of the most venerable masters of traditional Islamic philosophy in Persia in recent times, with the commentary of Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, Qum, Intishārāt-i islāmī, 1981. As far as we know, this is the only thorough work of an Islamic character which tried to answer dialectical materialism from a philosophical point of view, drawing from traditional Islamic philosophy, especially the school of Mullā Ṣadrā. The Iraqi scholar and traditional philosopher Bāqir al-Ṣadr had also written on this subject but not with the same thoroughness.

10. See Chap. 1, note 7.

11. See, for example, A. Leroi-Gourhan, Gesture and Speech, trans. A. B. Berger, Cambridge, M. I. T. Press, 1993; J. Servier, L'Homme et l'invisible; E. Zolla, (ed.), Eternità e storia. I valori permanenti nel divenire storico; and G. Durand "Défiguration philosophique et figure traditionnelle de l'homme en Occident." Even an academic authority such as Lévi-Strauss, the founder of structuralism, has said, "les hommes ont toujours pensé aussi bien."

Servier, while offering a vast amount of scientific evidence against the idea of man's evolution, criticizes modern evolutionists in these terms: "II vaudrait mieux admettre que l'évolutionnisme materialiste est une religion demandant beaucoup à la foi et peu à la raison. Darwin a parlé des 'lunettes obscures du theologian' et le mot à fait fortune. Mais quelles lunettes de tenébres chaussent le nez des évolutionnistes!" Servier, op. cit., p. 9.

12. It must be said, however, that fortunately in Islam there have not as yet appeared any figures representing "evolutionary religion" possessing the same degree of influence as can be seen in Hinduism

and Christianity, where such men as Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin have rallied numerous supporters around themselves. The metaphysical teachings of Islam based upon the immutability of the Divine Principle have until now been too powerful to permit the widespread influence of any such deviation.

13. See Abū Bakr Sīrāj ed-Dīn, "The Islamic and Christian Conceptions of the March of Time," Islamic Quarterly, 1954, Vol. I, pp. 229-235. We have dealt extensively with the metaphysical impossibility of evolution in our Knowledge and the Sacred, chapter 7, pp. 221 ff.

14. See Lord Northbourne, Looking Back on Progress, London, Perennial Books, 1970; M. Lings Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions, Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1991; and F. Schuon, Light on the Ancient Worlds.

15. See W. N. Perry, "The Revolt against Moses," Studies in Comparative Religion, Spring, 1966, pp. 103-119; F. Schuon, "The Psychological Imposture," ibid., pp. 98-102; and René Guénon, The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, Chap.. XXIV et seq. As far as Jung is concerned, his influence can be even more dangerous than that of Freud, precisely because he deals more with traditional symbols but from a psychological rather than spiritual point of view. See T. Burckhardt, Mirror of the Intellect, trans. W. Stoddart, Albany (NY), State University of New York Press, 1987, chapter 2, pp. 45 ff.

16. On the significance of the void in Islamic art, see, T. Burckhardt, "The Void in Islamic Art," in his Mirror of the Intellect, chapter 22, pp. 231 ff.; and S. H. Nasr "The Significance of the Void in the Art," in Islamic Art and Spirituality, chapter XII, pp. 185 ff.

17. See S. H. Nasr, Islamic Life and Thought, chapters 11 and 12, pp. 124 ff. It is somewhat paradoxical that Our Philosophy is the title of one of the most famous philosopical works of the Iraqī thinker Bāqir al-Ṣadr, who belongs to the tradition of Islamic philosophy and is one of the most important Islamic thinkers of the past few decades. This fact itself proves to what extent alien modes of thought have penetrated even into more or less traditional circles of Islamic philosophy. See Our Philosophy, trans. by Sh. Inati, London and New York, KPI, 1987.

18. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Kitāb al-mashāᶜir* (Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques), chapter IV of the Introduction. See also T. Izutsu, The Concept and Reality of Existence, Tokyo, Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971, where a profound analysis of Islamic ontol-

ogy is to be found, even if in Chapter II certain comparisons are made with Western existentialism which appear to us as difficult to accept. We have also dealt with this subject in our *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy*, Tehran, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997.

19. See S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, and Man and Nature, chapter 2.

Part V

Postscript

CHAPTER 12

ISLAM AT THE DAWN OF THE NEW CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM

Let it be mentioned at the outset of this chapter that the year two thousand is in itself not of any vital millennial or eschatological significance for Islam as it is for Christianity or at least for many Christians and it does not mean an automatic beginning of a new era for Muslims as even many secularists in the West, who no longer accept Christian millennial ideas, envisage. As far as eschatological expectations are concerned, Muslims expect the coming of the Mahdī, who will then prepare for the second coming of Christ and not the return of Christ directly, although like traditional Christians they also expect his return. Some Muslims in fact point to an enigmatic saying (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet of Islam which asserts, "The life of my community shall be one and a half days" and interpret it to mean one thousand five hundred years on the basis of the Quranic verse that a day with the Lord is like a thousand years. It also needs to be added at the beginning of this discourse that Mahdiism and the expectation of the fairly imminent appearance of the Mahdī is widespread in many circles in the Islamic world today and is of great significance, but we shall not deal with it here save to point to its existence. Rather, we shall use the number 2000 associated with the birth of Christ more in an emblematic fashion as far as the Islamic world is concerned and discuss the various aspects of the faith, practice, teachings, intellectual life and civilization of Islam as

we enter what for both the Christian and the secular West is the beginning of both a new century and a new millennium.

Before discussing any other matter, it must be noted that despite the encroachment of secularism in certain sectors of Islamic society, the element of faith (*īmān*) in Islam and the practice of its tenets remains very strong among the vast majority of Muslims and if anything has become strengthened rather than weakened in the last decades of the 20th century among the modernized classes and also among people such as the Palestinians, Bosnians, Chechnians and Kosovars who have suffered great tragedies during these years. One usually counts the followers of various religions quantitatively and asserts let us say that there are some fifty million Christians in France and fifty-five million Muslims in Egypt. But such accounts veil the question of the degree of attachment to one's faith. It is enough to visit a major Cairo mosque such as Sayyiduna Ḥusayn's and a major church in Paris such as St. Sulpice to observe the difference involved at this point of history. This is not to say that there are not numerous devout Christians outside of Europe and many in Europe itself. Rather, this difference is mentioned so that those acquainted only with the situation of Christianity and Judaism in Western secular societies do not judge the place and role of Islam in the Islamic world in the same manner. The presence of faith and the following of religious prescriptions especially the acts of worship (*ʿibādāt*) in Islam, which should be compared more to the practice of Christianity in the West in pre-modern days rather than today, is bound to continue and there is no sign that in the near future at least the forces of secularism will be able to affect Muslim faith and worship in the same ways that they affected the faith and practice of Christianity in Europe during the past few centuries and especially in recent times. This having been said, it is also necessary to assert that the quality and depth of faith has diminished and its vision narrowed among many Muslims and especially the light of Truth has become more difficult to find and paths leading to its attainment less accessible than before in accordance with the predictions of the Quran concerning the latter days.

While faith in Islam has remained strong and is bound to

continue to be so into the foreseeable future for most Muslims, Islamic civilization which was created on the basis of the Quranic revelation and through integration of pre-existing elements in accord with the Islamic view, helping to create a totally Islamic ambience, both material and intellectual, began to be seriously threatened from the 19th century onward with the spread of colonialism and modernism in the Islamic world. Since Islam is a total way of life, the partial destruction of its civilization, as observed in the domains of education, culture, art and architecture, etc., has had an impact on the all encompassing character of the religion and the degree of the Muslims attachment to its all-embracing tenets and must therefore also be considered in any projection that one makes about Islam as a religion in the narrower sense of the term in the coming century. Interestingly enough, while the influence of secularism and modernism upon the Islamic world has increased rather than decreased during the past half century along with the nominal independence of Muslim countries, and despite further devastation of the traditional living space of Muslims, there is now also observable an attempt to revive Islamic civilization itself. The current call for the dialogue of civilizations which came originally from Iran recently and has been adopted as a theme for the United Nations for the year 2001, is itself a sign of the Muslims' desire to preserve their distinct civilization despite the numerous challenges which such an undertaking faces in its encounter with forces of much greater worldly strength. To ponder upon the future of Islam, it is therefore necessary not only to deal with the religion but also to delve into civilizational factors which are directly related to the faith as well as into the challenges which Islam faces as both a religion and a world civilization spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific and with an ever more significant presence as a religion in Europe and America.

To understand the present state of Islam and hence its most likely immediate future, it must be remembered that Islam does not function within the same politico-social matrix as does Christianity in the West. In the Occident from the end of the Middle Ages onward, Christianity became ever more marginalized from the domain of public life and also from the arena of

intellectual activity by forces which were born and nourished from within the Christian European society of the day and not as a result of external domination. In contrast Islamic countries, with few exceptions, were dominated directly or indirectly by external colonial powers which even after their departure left behind a political class which, although native, possessed a mental perspective akin to the worldview of the West and distinct from the prevailing beliefs and Weltanschauung of the vast majority of those over whom they ruled in the name of independence and nationalism. Nor has this situation changed in most places even today. Islam is challenged in many parts of the Islamic world not only from the outside but also by the so-called "ruling elite" which relies upon the power of the West and could not survive for long without its support. Obviously this situation poses a major challenge for Islam which cannot accept the privatization and subjectivization of religion and does not enjoy the freedom to respond creatively on the basis of its own nature and genius to the problems that the modern world poses for it.

In this context the question of law is particularly significant. As has been already mentioned, Islamic possesses a Sacred Law (*al-Sharī^{c}ah*) which is as central to it as theology is to Christianity. This Law has its roots in the Quran and the wonts (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet and is immutable in its principles and yet a growing reality like a tree whose roots are firmly sunk in the earth, while its branches grow from season to season. For the traditional Muslim the *Sharī^{c}ah* represents the concrete embodiment of the Divine Will and to practice Islam means to follow the *Sharī^{c}ah*. Now, in most Islamic countries, during the 19th century the *Sharī^{c}ah* was set aside in favor of various European codes by either the colonial powers or modernized Muslims themselves influenced by Western ideas of secular law which was based on premises very different from the Islamic conception which sees God as the ultimate Lawgiver (*al-Shārī^{c}*), a view which would be easily understood and in fact confirmed by orthodox Jews and in the realm of moral laws by Christians as well. But for Muslims the *Sharī^{c}ah* concerns not only moral laws but also everyday laws which govern human society.

The outward political independence of Muslim countries

after the Second World War caused the majority of people to expect a return to the practice of the *Sharīᶜah* and when this did not happen and the secular laws promulgated by the modernists failed in many ways, a battle set in within the Islamic world itself. One sees this tension between "ruling elites" which support a secular understanding of law and favor economic and political institutions based on European models and the majority of Muslims for whom legitimate laws and legal institutions mean essentially the *Sharīᶜah* and its complements which jurists had accepted as *qānūn* over the centuries and for which *Sharīᶜite* legitimacy had been established. Sometimes this tension turns to riots and suppressions and sometimes into open revolt and confrontation as we have seen in Egypt and Algeria during the last decade of the twentieth century.

This tension, which is a concrete and widespread aspect of the more general confrontation between traditional Islam and modernity, has led in recent decades to activist movements which often employ Western political ideologies and methods and yet oppose the West and which have been dubbed as "fundamentalism," a most unfortunate term that has nevertheless become prevalent. As a result, we now have in the Islamic world not only traditionalists and modernists, but in reality traditionalists, "fundamentalists" and modernists with rarely clearly defined boundaries between them. As long as the pressure of modernism and now also post-modernism upon the Islamic world continues and this tension is not resolved within Islamic societies, confrontations to which the world has been witness in recent years will continue. It is important to mention, however, that there is no proportion, numerically and qualitatively speaking between followers of traditional Islam and members of the other two groups which vie with each other for power and will continue to do so in the future. Interestingly enough, politically speaking all the governments in the Islamic world today, even those that possess a traditional structure, are controlled by either the modernists or by so-called fundamentalists but not by traditional Islam which, however, remains strong and manifests its influence within structures controlled by other groups and is likely to continue to do so in the near future while

its power and influence increases intellectually and spiritually especially among the more modern educated classes.

The Islamic world is not only challenged by secular laws left over from the colonial period but also by a secularized view of the world and forms of knowledge itself which were brought to the Islamic world through domination by the modern secularized West and if anything these forms of knowledge have spread their influence since the end of the colonial era. The worldview which grew out of the Renaissance and the 17th century Scientific Revolution in the West divorced knowledge of the natural world from theology and this process was followed gradually in other disciplines reaching into the humanities and what has come to be known as the social sciences which were infected by scientism and positivism since their very inception in the 19th century and were even conceived under the influence of these philosophies. The result for the West and consequently for segments of Islamic society influenced by modern Western thought was on the one hand the dominance of the quantitative and rationalistic view of the world as consisting of dead matter in motion in which life and consciousness were but accidents and in which God's Will could not be operative, and on the other hand the spread of a whole educational system based on a secularized view of knowledge which interestingly enough was also propagated by Christian missionaries in the Islamic world who usually preferred a secularized Muslim to a devout one as possible subject for conversion.

Traditional Islam sees the cosmos as reflections of the Divine Names and Qualities and their interactions. For example, the universe reflects the Divine Name *al-Ḥayy* (the Living) and is therefore alive and the same holds true for the other Names. Life and consciousness are not accidents in an otherwise dead cosmos. Rather, they are manifestations of realities that are part and parcel of God's creation. Furthermore, God is not only the creator of the world but also its sustainer and ruler. For Islam He cannot under any condition be reduced to the role of the clockmaker favored by so many proponents of classical modern science. As for education, Islam had refused throughout

its history to separate knowledge from the sacred and the category of "secular science" was totally alien to its unitary view of knowledge. The traditional Islamic schools and universities (madrasahs) reflected this view of knowledge in their curriculum, philosophy of education, course content, etc.

Needless to say, this major challenge posed to the traditional Islamic view of the world and of knowledge in general caused diverse and complicated reactions in the Islamic world which cannot be treated here. What is certain, however, is that these issues continue to loom very large on the horizon of Islamic intellectual life. In the Muslim world today, governments of all political persuasion from the left to the right and from secularist to so-called Islamic, as well as many religious scholars who are not aware of the real nature of modern science, which most equate blindly with the Quranic concept of *ʿilm* or scientia that is so highly extolled in the Sacred Text, continue to praise without reserve and support totally modern Western science. The main reason is that they see the power that this science bestows upon its possessors without which many feel that the Islamic world cannot free itself from the political and economic, not to speak of the military, domination of the West.

And yet, during the past few decades voices have arisen in the Islamic world about the danger of a secularized science for the Islamic worldview and for the Islamic religion itself especially since Islam is a religion based upon the knowledge of the nature of reality which ultimately issues from and returns to Reality (*al-ḥaqīqah*) or God Himself one of whose Names is *al-Ḥaqq* or Truth/Reality. Islamic responses to this issue have been diverse and different views continue to be debated as to what is "Islamic science" and whether the Islamic world should develop its own Islamic science or simply adopt modern secularized science. There have been no responses to this question that have been universally accepted by all the intellectual elements involved in such debates. But at least since we began to discuss these matters forty years ago and challenged the prevalent views of many Muslim thinkers, both modern and traditional, who for different reasons were preaching the blind

acceptance of modern science, the intellectual scene in the Islamic world has changed a great deal and there are now many voices concerned with the deeper theological and spiritual questions issuing from the confrontation of the Islamic religion and modern science. As we enter the new Christian millennium this issue is bound to remain central to Islamic religious and theological thought. Furthermore, it is also likely that inter-religious dialogue especially between Islam and Christianity that has been taking place during the past decades will spread more and more into the domain of the relation between religion and science.

As for education and the various disciplines of knowledge taught in schools, the colonial experience left most Islamic countries with two educational systems, one Islamic and the other Western, either brought by foreigners, most of whom were missionaries, or established by modernized Western oriented Muslim "elites" on the model of Western institution of learning. These two types of institutions possess completely different philosophies of education. As a result in most Islamic countries, especially those which first confronted modernism and which had also been major intellectual centers of the Islamic world such as Egypt, Turkey, Persia and Muslim India a deep chasm began to appear in society between two educated classes with the same ethnic background, religion, language, etc. but unable to understand each other because they interpreted the world through two different prisms. Strangely enough with the political independence of Muslim countries this dichotomy and breach only deepened and also spread geographically to countries such as Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, Oman, Afghanistan, the Sudan and many other countries which had functioned mostly with only their traditional educational system before.

The question of integrating Western modes of learning into the Islamic perspective and creating a single educational system, which would be Islamic and yet able to expand to include modern disciplines, began to occupy the mind of many Muslim intellectuals from the fifties and sixties onward and led to the first world conference on Islamic education held in Mecca in

1977. This effort led to the establishment of several Islamic universities, the preparation of integrated curricula, etc. and the movement called the "Islamization of knowledge." Although these efforts have not been completely satisfactory, they remain a major Islamic intellectual concern. How to make educational institutions imported from the West more Islamic or expand existing traditional madrasahs to embrace modern disciplines is debated across the Islamic world and many different solutions have been proposed and implemented ranging from the integration of the oldest of all Islamic traditional *madrasahs*, the Qarawiyyīn, in Morocco as the Faculty of Theology within the modern University of Rabat, to the expansion of the greatest center of Sunni learning, al-Azhar in Cairo, to include schools of medicine and engineering to the creation of creative interaction in Persia between the traditional madrasahs of Qom, Mashhad, etc.—also called *ḥawzah*—with the Western style universities. None of these attempts has as yet been totally successful. But the effort continues as an ongoing project and is bound to continue in future years as a central concern of Islamic thought. The great impact of this issue and how it is resolved upon Islam and Islamic society can hardly be exaggerated.

Closely related to both the issues of science and education is that of modern technology which continues to penetrate in an ever greater degree into the Islamic world, as elsewhere, supported as it is by governments for both internal and external reasons with which we cannot deal in this essay. In an earlier period the Islamic world did have its Luddites, but in recent decades few obstacles have been placed before the rapid spread of Western technology and few Muslim thinkers have bothered to delve into the religious and spiritual implications of the use of the modern machine on a vast scale. If anything many of the more recent religious leaders, even those who support traditional views theologically, have championed the wholesale adoption of Western technology with as great a rapidity as possible and this holds true whether one is speaking of Saudi Arabia with its traditional monarchy or Persia with its Islamic

revolutionary government. In Persia, where in such cities as Qom, the religious center of the country, the traditional scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) remained until recently aloof from modern modes of life affected to an ever greater degree by modern technology, matters have changed to such a degree that now most religious students in Qom have mastery of the use of the computer. Some visitors have in fact reported that the libraries of Qom are more "advanced" than the Vatican library in making their holdings available on the internet.

This attitude of indifference to the religious, moral and spiritual consequences of modern technology in the Islamic world is now, however, beginning to change for two reasons: problems issuing from modern genetic engineering along with related activities and the environmental crisis both of which are directly caused by the implementation of modern technology. The intrusion of modern medicine into the very fabric of human life and of the penetration of genetic engineering into the inner structure of living things have caused much alarm not only among many Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and followers of other religions, but also in many Islamic circles as have the ethical implications of organ transplants and the like not to speak of cloning. As for the environment, the rapid deterioration of the natural environment globally has caused many Muslims, who thought until recently that this was simply a Western problem, to turn reluctantly to the issue of Islam's attitudes and teachings about the environment. There is no doubt that in coming years both of these issues, which are in fact interrelated on many levels, will become more and more central to Islam on both a theoretical and a practical level as they have become for Christianity. Islam has to reformulate in terms that are clearly understood by the present generation its philosophy or rather theology and metaphysics of nature, to which so many verses of the Quran are devoted. It must also clarify its ethical teachings concerning the non-human world and expand the teachings of the *Sharīʿah* upon foundations already contained therein to embrace a full fledged environmental ethics based upon the Islamic religion and not simply a rationalistic philos-

ophy which would create an ethics that would have no efficacy among the vast majority of Muslims. Such efforts are also bound to be of great importance in the future for Islamic intellectual life as well as for the daily life of the Islamic community.

Modern Western technology has brought with it not only forms of production that alienate man from his work and bestow power to its owners which allows them to dominate to a greater degree than before over those not in possession of new technologies, but it has also made possible massive flow of information and hitherto unimaginable possibilities of communication on a mass scale associated with modern forms of printing, the telephone, the radio, the cinema, the television, and now the internet. While these means have made possible a small flow of ideas and information from the Islamic world and other non-Western cultures and civilizations to the West, the direction of the flow remains almost completely in the other direction with the result that non-Western cultures are bombarded as never before by alien ideas, images and depictions of alien life styles. The consequence of this phenomenon for the Islamic world has been and remains considerable and needs to be mentioned on several levels and in a number of different domains all of which have and are bound to have an affect upon the practice of Islam and its response to the world in the future.

On the most palpable level there is the ever increasing bombardment of Islamic society, and especially its youth, with the products of Western and especially American pop culture and the hedonistic aspects of Western life. The new media do not emphasize the presentation of the music of Virgil Thompson or Leonard Bernstein but of rock and roll (one should not forget the lewd meaning of the term rock when it was first used in this context), not classical American ballet but the most sexually suggestive dances performed by the young in ambiences hardly conducive to the cultivation of religious discipline and the sobriety that Islam emphasizes so much as a central characteristic of the religious life. Quantitatively speaking, more than Marx, Heidegger, Russell and Sartre, it is the Michael Jacksons and

Madonnas who pose a challenge to Islamic society as a whole as they are so attractive to a large number of the young especially in bigger cities. The idea of rebellion by the young and even the specific American notion of "teen-ager" which is a specific term found only in American English and not in other languages—certainly not Islamic ones—as well as practices involving drinking, use of drugs, sexual promiscuity, etc. are all anathema to Islam's teachings about society in which obedience to God's laws, significance of the family, respect for elders and especially parents, abstention from alcohol and sexual activity outside of marriage, etc. are strongly emphasized. Like Christianity and Judaism in the West which spend much of their energy confronting such issues, Islam is already forced to face such problems on a smaller scale and is bound to do so on a greater scale in the future. Many have said that the major challenge of the West to the Islamic world comes not so much from philosophy and ideology as from new life styles especially as they concern the young. Without in any case diminishing the importance of the intellectual and philosophical elements, we also wish to emphasize how important the question of lifestyle is. Already the emulation of Western dress and adoption of many aspects of Western lifestyle by earlier generations of modernized Muslims have caused much tension and contention within the Islamic world. In the future this tension is bound to increase as modern technologies of communication make the impact of modern and post-modern Western culture much more pervasive and intrusive and as there is created ever stronger Islamic reactions to these intrusions.

There is another basic question involved in this issue of lifestyle which is both part of this issue and larger than it and that is the relation between man and woman. Islam is based not only on a doctrine about the nature of reality and of God who is the ultimately Real and possesses the means of attaining spiritual perfection by living according to the Divine Norm, but it is also a community, an *ummah*. The laws of the *Sharīᶜah* are promulgated with the ummah in view. The new wave of ideas concerning the role of women that has been cultivated in the West

during the past several decades and which is called feminism, challenges many aspects of the Islamic understanding of the relation between man and woman, the family as well as society at large. Although there are different strands of feminism in the West, most of them are secularist and seek to change even the language of the Bible and in any case base themselves on the idea of a quantitative equality between men and women in all realms. In contrast, for Islam, while men and women are equal as immortal beings before God, they have been created in a complementary fashion like the yin and yang of Far Eastern doctrines. The question of working outside of the home, participation in economic and political life, etc. are all secondary to the basic metaphysical and theological issues involved.

Now, Western feminism is not only concerned with the question of the status of women in the West but also considers itself to have a global mission like Christian missionaries and propagators of so many other ideas and ideologies that have come out of the West from Marxism to liberal democracy. The attempt of Western feminism to penetrate aggressively to the degree possible into the Islamic world by both internal and external means has spawned many local movements in various Islamic countries ranging from emulation of the most secular strands of Western feminism that is particularly opposed to Islam for many complicated reasons, to what is now called Islamic feminism. In this domain, as in so many others, the Islamic world is faced with ideas and agendas that are imposed upon it from the outside very much in contrast to the West itself. In any case this question is one of the most important facing the Islamic world today on the social level. Many different solutions have been proposed and implemented as one can see in differences in the role now being played on the social level by women in Nigeria, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Persia, Pakistan and Indonesia just to give examples of several major Islamic countries. There is little doubt that Islam as a religion will continue to be involved in the coming years and decades with the question of the role, rights and duties of women in its own realm while it studies not as a source of emulation but as an ongoing social

experiment what is occurring in the West and especially America which keeps experimenting with different possibilities, many of which have hardly had a positive outcome as far as marriage and divorce, the rearing of children by both parents and even "fulfillment" about which so much has been said, are concerned.

There are many other realms in which Western ideas have forced or been catalysts for responses within the Islamic world. Since Islam is not only a private religion but one that is also concerned with society in all its aspects, a particularly important domain in which there is a great deal of turmoil at this juncture of Islamic history is the political. A combination of complicated factors related to the colonial experience, the imposition of foreign forms and ideas of government, nationalism issuing from the French Revolution, reassertion of Islamic values, tension between modernized and traditional classes within Islamic society and of course global Realpolitik and the continuous political and economic domination of the West have made it very difficult for many parts of the Islamic world to find a satisfactory political modus vivendi. This whole issue has been made more complicated by the fact that Islam has always held the unity of the *ummah* as an ideal and the unity of the Islamic world remains a cherished goal despite the existence of present forms of nationalism. It might of course be said that this issue is a political and not religious question, but such an interpretation is a Western and not an Islamic one. For Islam religion is never separated from the political domain in the sense of giving unto Caesar what is Caesar's and will not be so in the future. The question therefore is not how to emulate the American idea of the separation of church and state, but of how and in what way will the state reflect Islam and Islamic values. At least that is the case for most Islamic countries there being a few exceptions, such as Turkey. But even there history will tell whether an early 20th century idea based upon European definitions of secularism now dominant among the ruling classes in that country will continue to survive in this century at a time when even in America religion challenges more and more the monopoly of secularism in the public domain.

With the traditional political institutions especially the

caliphate and the sultanate described by classical Islamic thinkers destroyed in most Islamic lands, the question of the form of government, the source of its legitimacy, the relation between its authority and that of the *Sharīᶜah* as interpreted by the traditional scholars (*ᶜulamāᵓ*), and the place for the voice of the people and the *ᶜulamāᵓ* loom large on the horizon. There is little doubt that in this new century of the Christian calendar much of the energy and attention of Islamic thinkers will be devoted to these issues and the means to achieve the goal of greatly political unity among Muslim peoples and nations. Moreover, the different attempts made during this century to define what is an Islamic state from traditional models of Morocco and Saudi Arabia to three different understandings of the Islamic state in the neighboring countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan will surely continue. There is bound to be a fluid and unstable situation in many lands, pitting so-called fundamentalists against Western supported modernists and each one against the traditionalists and in some cases modernists against Western supported traditional institutions with the color of an earlier form of so-called fundamentalism as seen in Saudi Arabia.

In many Muslim countries Islamic political thought is now also much concerned with the question of freedom and its meaning in an Islamic context, with democracy and participation of the people in the political process and many other issues for which the West has often been a catalyst although for economic and political reasons of self interest the West has not been particularly anxious to support those who speak of Islamic democracy within the Islamic world, at least not in countries whose governments are favorable to the West. Such concerns also of course include the issue of human rights which is defended in the West for the most part on a secularist basis. In the Islamic world there are those who claim that this issue is simply a part of the arsenal of Western policy to be used when convenient. There are others who are trying to define human rights from the point of view of Islam and in light of human responsibility before God which always preceded human rights in classical Islamic thought which has taught that God gave man social rights as well as certain rights over the world of

nature in light of man's responsibility before God concerning himself, human society and God's creation. Religious thinking along those lines is bound to continue in the future and there is likely to be much cooperation between Muslim thinkers and those in the West and elsewhere who speak of the necessity of a global declaration of human responsibility before over-emphasis of only human rights puts an end to human life on earth.

As with politics so with economics, Islamic thought has had to concern itself with issues posed for it by modern economic systems based upon philosophies alien to the ethos of Islam. In response to economic theories and practices of both capitalism and socialism, Islamic thinkers have dealt extensively in recent decades with what has come to be known as Islamic economics. This type of intellectual activity as well as applications to concrete situations are not only of concern to economics but also to Islam itself as a religion as Muslims see it. In fact Islam has never separated economics from ethics and what is called economics today has always been envisaged and practiced in the Islamic world in the context of the *Sharīᶜah*. Furthermore, Islamic thought cannot remain impervious to many current economic theories and practices such as charging of interest and consumerism. With the pressure increasing to create a global economy, the Islamic world is bound to continue to experience external and internal pressure to conform even more than before to foreign economic ideas and practices. But by token of the same fact, activity in the realm of what is now known as Islamic economics is bound to continue and in fact increase and a significant part of Islamic intellectual efforts is bound to be concerned in the future with Islamic economics including the question of economic justice and the implementation of Islamic ideas in situations ever more difficult than what one finds today.

Having discussed the domains of concern to Islamic thought, it is necessary now to return to the heart of the religion itself as it confronts the future. As far as what Christianity would call dogmatic theology is concerned, Islam rests firmly rooted in the certainties of its traditional worldview. No matter

how much Western orientalists have tried to cast doubt above the celestial origin of the Quran, the Sacred Text remains the verbatim Word of God for all Muslims, the one or two voices to the contrary being irrelevant no matter how aggrandized they might have become in the West. As for the *Ḥadīth*, historical challenges have been fully recognized and Islamic responses provided although debates continue on this issue on the basis of traditional Islamic criteria and only rarely within the matrix of Western historicism. Altogether as far as the nature of God, prophecy, revelation, angelology and eschatology are concerned, Islam does not face the same crises as Western Christianity has done in modern times nor is this reality likely to change in the near future. Modern Western theological debates about the gender of God or whether He is immutable or changing, as claimed by process theologians, are alien to Islamic concerns. Furthermore, because of the still living reality of Islamic metaphysics, it is most likely that Islam will be able to continue to provide intellectual responses to the challenges of modernism in the form of historicism, rationalism, empiricism and the like and not to surrender parts of its theological worldview to modernism as has happened in many of the Western churches. When people talk about traditional and modern interpretations of Islam, they must understand that the debate does not involve so much the nature of God, eschatology or the practice of the rites of the religion as we see in the West in debates between more traditional and modern interpreters of religion, but most of all interpretations and applications of the religion of Islam to the social and human domains.

This having been said, it is necessary to add that since the encounter with modernism, many Muslim thinkers have tried through different means to create a new chapter in Islamic theology (kalam). This effort in fact goes back to Muḥammad ᶜAbduh and the late 13th/19th century although that early effort was quite limited and for the most part unsuccessful. This type of activity is bound to increase in the future especially as more and more of those Muslims educated in traditional madrasahs become acquainted more deeply with Western

thought and the roots of prevalent Western ideas. In fact the Islamic response to the challenges of modern and post-modern thought have deepened during the past few decades and are bound to continue to do so in coming years. The trend begun in several Islamic countries to teach what the Persians call *kalām-i jadīd* or "new theology" is bound to continue and expand. This "new theology" is not, however, a break with traditional theologies as has happened in many churches in the West, but applications of Islamic principles to new challenges posed by modernism, ranging from Darwinism to Comptianism to Freudianism to logical positivism and more recently to deconstructionism and the like.

There is one further theological question of importance that must also be mentioned and which in a way marks a new chapter in Islamic religious thought. It is the re-examination of the relation between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism. These two branches of Islam had polemics and sometimes conflicts with each other over the centuries. These polemics became intensified with the founding of the Shi^{c}ite Safavid state in the 16th century facing the powerful Sunni Ottomans as a result of which Sunni-Shi^{c}ite religious and theological differences becoming entangled in political contentions and rivalries between the two empires. Furthermore, throughout the colonial period full use was made of Sunni-Shi^{c}ite differences by British and other colonialist powers, in order to divide and rule.

In the 19th century Wahhābism set itself strongly against Shi^{c}ism with tragic consequences in Iraq and Arabia. But from the 1950's onward a strong movement was begun in Egypt in cooperation with Iran to create peace and better mutual understanding between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism. The center established in Cairo by the then Shaykh al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt with the aid of a number of Shi^{c}ite ^{c}*ulamā*$^{\circ}$ was known as *dār al-taqrīb* and its function was similar to that of ecumenical organizations which have sought to create better understanding among various Christian churches. From that date onward the ^{c}*ulamā*$^{\circ}$ of both Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism (excluding of course most Wahhābī/Salafī scholars) have been in favor of better mutual

understanding and respect and have been closer to each other than perhaps at any other period of Islamic history.

During the last decades, however, the fire of hatred between the two major branches of Islam has been lit in many places for different political and ideological reasons as one sees in Iraq, Bahrain, Afghanistan and especially Pakistan and India where conflicts between the two groups has reached unprecedented proportions. The situation has called for a renewal of the efforts of the *dār al-taqrīb* and many Islamic scholars are now devoting much time to re-thinking many of the theological and religious differences between Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism and to bringing about greater internal understanding within the Islamic world itself. This new theological and religious effort in the direction of greater internal dialogue and ecumenism within Islam is bound to persist and to occupy the mind of many Muslim thinkers in the future complementing the dialogue with other religions.

It must be remembered that Islam does not possess only a Law governing human society and embracing what is usually understood by religion today and a wealth of theological thought, but also an inner or esoteric message which came to be crystallized mostly in Sufism and which deals with the purification of man's inner being and the full realization of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*). From the 13th/19th century onward two forces in the Islamic world began to oppose Sufism and its vast influence upon all aspects of human society from economic guilds to music. These two forces were modernism and that puritanical rationalism identified mostly with the Wahhābī/Salafī movement. But far from dying out, Sufism has continued to flourish among traditional elements of society and during the past few decades to an ever-greater degree among Western educated classes. This trend is likely to persist as Sufism also continues to draw many people in the West to the inner teachings of Islam. Sufi metaphysics, cosmology, psychology and spiritual methods as well as art, especially in the form of poetry and music, constitute the intellectual and spiritual heart of Islam and are bound to play an ever greater role in the life of those

Muslims seeking responses to the philosophical and artistic challenges of the modern world and deeper religious meaning in a world becoming ever more chaotic.

The continued vitality of Islam as a faith also implies continuity in the creation of sacred art in this tradition, whether it be calligraphy, architecture, or Quranic psalmody, all of which make possible the experience of the sacred in the ambience of every day life. Now, Sufism has an inalienable link with traditional Islamic art which has suffered much in many domains during the past century especially as far as architecture is concerned. Therefore, the revival of interest in Sufism in the past few decades is bound to have its salutary effect upon both the survival and the revival of various Islamic arts, a revival which began a few decades ago and which is to be seen today in many lands from Morocco to Persia to Indonesia. Despite the horrendous invasion of ugliness in the name of progress and modernism in many Islamic cities, the revival of Islamic art and architecture is bound to continue in the future along with not only the revival of Sufism but also with the reformulation of its teachings in a contemporary and more easily accessible language and pertaining to many domains including the philosophy of art.

The rise of interest in Sufism is also related to the need for the solution of another major challenge faced by Islam, namely the diversity of religions or what is currently being called religious pluralism. Christian theology has been concerned with this issue for may decades and numerous Western Christian theologians and philosophers of religion, both Catholic and Protestant, have tried to create a "theology of religious pluralism" in a Christian context. The Quran is perhaps the most universalist of all sacred scriptures in the sense of asserting openly that religion begins with the origin of the human state itself, that God has revealed religion to all peoples and that He has created diverse religions so that followers of various religions would vie with each other in piety and virtue. On the basis of these teachings, many scholars and theologians throughout Islamic history showed much interest in what has now come to

be known as comparative religion or Religionwissenschaft. But it was most of all the Sufis such as Ibn ᶜArabī and Rūmī who expounded the meaning of this universality and during this century it was from the same Sufi tradition that those in the West such as René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon who spoke of the unity of traditions and the "transcendent unity of religions" drew their inspiration. It remained for the latter and several other traditional authors to expound for today's humanity the Quranic doctrine of the universality of revelation in its fullness.

The question of religious diversity is among the most widely discussed in the Islamic world today and there is much interest among Muslim thinkers to carry out religious dialogue not only with Christians and Jews but also with Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, Taoists and others. Most likely this trend will continue and expand in the future drawing a larger number of Muslim thinkers into circles of discussion and necessitating a more general appreciation of the classical Sufi and contemporary traditionalist metaphysics which alone can provide a matrix for the understanding of religious diversity without relativization and sacrifice of "the sense of the Absolute" which lies at the heart of religion. One cannot imagine the future of Islamic intellectual activity without this strand of thought constituting one of its main elements.

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In light of what has been said, it might be asked whether Islam and post-modernism can co-exist. If Islam is understood as a total way of life embracing the domains of action as well as thought, the external as well as the inner world of its adherents, then the answer to this question is no in the same way that Islam as a totality cannot co-exist with modernism. Post-modernism opposes in many ways the theses of modernism but not in the direction of the re-assertion of the reality of the Sacred and intellectual and spiritual certitude. On the contrary it opposes all forms of certitude, all "absolutes," all that is permanent and abiding. It seeks to deconstruct the sacred struc-

tures of religion and even sacred scripture itself. While modernism emphasized rationality and rationalism, post-modernism rejects even the knowledge gained by the use of man's limited reason not to speak of the intellect and revelation which are the twin sources of ultimate knowledge in all traditions including Islam. For Islam to co-exist with such a worldview would mean accepting that which is opposed totally to all for which Islam stands, to the acceptance of the Absolute and our total surrender to the revelation which descends from It. Co-existence is in fact itself problematic unless one speaks from the point of view of expediency. Co-existence means the existence of one reality besides another. In principle that cannot be accepted if one of the realities is based on the negation of the Divine and the very ground upon which the other worldview stands, substituting for it a radical secularist understanding of the nature of man and the world and the goal of human society. The Sacred demands of us all that we are and as Christ said, "A house divided unto itself cannot stand."

On the plane of practicality and expediency, however, the matter must be seen in a different light. Islam can exist and function in any ambience which gives its followers the freedom to practice their religion at least inwardly and privately if not in the general public arena and such an ambience could include one dominated by post-modernism as one sees in many contemporary Western societies. In fact the very relativization of values and cultural norms preached by post-modernism, while seeking to destroy sacred traditions and trivializing them and also superficially accepting certain of their tenets, allows at the same time a certain "space" to be created within which religions, whether they be Judaism, Christianity or Islam or for that matter Hinduism and Buddhism can be practiced to some extent. But of course such "spaces" are not allowed to cover the whole living space of the post-modern world and therefore conflicts are bound to arise in certain domains as we see even in the case of Christianity and Judaism which have existed in the West for two millennia.

Perhaps a more pertinent question would be to ask whether

post-modernism itself is a stable or a transient reality and whether it can survive before the light of sacred traditions in general and of Islam in particular. One must never lose sight of the rapidly changing nature of post-modernism as well as the manifestations of modernism themselves. Where are the philosophies and ideologies such as structuralism and Marxism which were so fashionable only two or three decades ago? What fads will parade as the latest and most important pattern of thought in the West a few decades from now? One thing is certain and that is that philosophies rooted in the Immutable continue to attract the minds and souls of many long after "timely philosophies" have been relegated to oblivion as we can see in the attraction for many people today of various versions of the perennial philosophy in comparison to widely held philosophical views of just a century ago. Islam is a religion based upon the nature of the Absolute and the primordial and immutable nature of man in his suchness beyond historical contingencies and like other religions rooted in the Divine is bound to survive long after post-modernism ceases to attract certain Western minds and is relegated to a chapter in Western intellectual history.

Questions such as the relation of religion to politics, the nature of knowledge, the source of ethics, the relation of private ethics to public life, the rapport between religion and science (including the social and human sciences) and many other issues which are of concern to post-modern philosophers are also of great interest to Islamic thought. There is every possibility of dialogue and discourse on such subjects and some have in fact already taken place. Through such discourse Islamic thought is bound to make a greater impact on the general intellectual and cultural discourse in the West than before and such discussions are also bound to affect issues and subjects of religious thought in the Islamic world itself. But this does not mean co-existence on the intellectual and principial plane unless Islam gives up its claim to the truth and the possibility of its attainment as have the typical post-modern thinkers or if post-modernism relinquishes its views and ceases to be post-modernism. As far as Islam is concerned, that possibility of the

acceptance of the relative as the only meaningful category and the banning of the very category of truth from intellectual discourse is suicidal and most unlikely.

On the practical level, however, as far as living in the same Lebensraum with proponents of post-modernism is concerned, that has already occurred for the many Islamic communities living in the West and is likely to do so in the future. What is important to consider here, in thinking about the future, is not only how religion in general and Islam in particular can survive in a world dominated by modernism and post-modernism, but also how and whether the modern world itself can survive for long while clinging to all those ideas such as secular humanism, rationalism, individualism, materialism and now more and more irrationalism that have defined modernity and laid the basis for post-modernism, ideas which the traditional Islamic worldview has rejected and continues to reject.

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For a Muslim the meaning of living Islam faithfully today and tomorrow has not changed essentially from doing so yesterday and the day before because the relation between man and God transcends time. As Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī says in a famous poem:

> There is a link beyond asking how, beyond all comparison
> Between the Lord of man and the soul of man.

That link (*ittiṣāl*) is beyond all externalities, beyond all temporal and spatial exigencies. In no matter what situation a Muslim finds himself or herself temporally or spatially, he or she can practice Islam faithfully by remaining aware of that inner link and by surrendering his or her will to that of the "Lord of man." The more difficult question is now to remain faithfully a Muslim externally in a world which in so many ways denies the reality of the Sacred and the rights of God. Within the Islamic world the problem is how to live according to

the *Sharīᶜah* and as part of the ummah in a world in which the homogeneity of the traditional ambience has been destroyed, where the Sacred Law is no longer the "law of the land" in many places, where nationalism has segmented the unity of the ummah, where many economic practices are not in conformity with Islamic tenets, where much of the urban setting no longer reflects the ethos of Islam. In such a situation to live faithfully as a Muslim means first of all to live inwardly as a person of faith, to practice the sacred rites which Islam makes possible under all circumstances and without the aid of any ecclesiastical figures since the priestly function is divided among all Muslims. It means to practice Islamic ethical teachings and for those who have the possibility and ability, to follow the spiritual path of inner purification. And it means to seek to the extent possible to live in the larger society according to Islamic norms and practices and to encourage fellow Muslims to do so by exhortation and example. It also means to abide by the truths of Islam on the intellectual plane and to combat intellectually all that would destroy the vision of reality based upon Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) as understood Islamically. It means to live in prayer, to seek the truth and to search for and create the beautiful for beauty is inseparable from truth. All of this means that one must carry out continuous inner exertion (*jihād*) in the path of God which the Prophet called the greater *jihād*. As for performing the smaller *jihād*, which means outward struggle for the defense and protection of Islam, that depends on complicated circumstances which are not the same for all Muslims and which must be discussed separately for each particular case and situation.

As far as Muslims living as a minority whether in the West, India, Burma, Russia, China or any other country are concerned, their situation is similar inwardly to Muslims living in *dār al-islām* or Abode of Islam itself. What is different is that they do not bear responsibility for general norms and law of the society in which they live but they do bear the responsibility for living righteously as Muslims and protecting the possibility of living within their homes and communities as Muslims.

Strangely enough, this latter task is now more difficult for Muslims living in such lands as China, Burma and parts of India, countries in which they have lived for many centuries and in some places for over a millennium, than in the West. This is paradoxical because in older days Europe was more virulently opposed to an Islamic presence on its soil than the Asian societies mentioned as can be seen by the destiny of Muslims in Spain after an eight hundred year presence. Today, however, the situation is reversed if we exclude the incredible genocide of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo in recent years to say nothing of the Russian brutalities in Chechnya.

There are now sizable Islamic communities in most European countries and Islam has become part of the mainstream religious scene in America. For those Muslims living in the West, the challenges of a secular and hedonistic culture are greater than in non-Western societies but there also exists the freedom to practice their religion, at least privately, especially in America where certain constraints seen in France and some other European countries are not to be found, although local problems continue to manifest themselves here and there. In these circumstances the way to live faithfully as a Muslim is essentially to practice the faith individually and strengthening the local Islamic communities to the extent possible without there being the burdens of responsibility for society at large which living in an Islamic society places upon the shoulders of Muslims who are members of such a society. It remains the duty of all minority Muslims who claim to practice their religion to remain steadfast in clinging to that inner "link," in surrendering themselves to God's Will and in practicing Islamic ethics to the highest degree that they are able to do. It also means to bear witness to the truths for which Islam stands and to confront through intellectual dialogue and discourse the errors which parade as norms today. In this task they share much with Jews, Christians and other religious groups with all of whom Muslims have the duty to have a rapport of mutual respect and friendship as promulgated by the teachings of the Quran and Ḥadith concerning the relation of Muslims to the "People of the

Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) which from the Islamic point of view means in its most universal sense those who accept the Oneness of the Divine Principle and follow a religion revealed by the One. Needless to say, Islamic teachings also emphasize that Muslims must exercise the same respect vis-à-vis religious communities living as minorities among them as they are expected to exercise vis-à-vis religions among whose followers they live themselves as minorities.

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As summary and in conclusion it can be said that when one looks upon the horizon into this new century and millennium of the Christian calendar and ponders upon Islam as a religion and way of life, one is lead to make the following observations: The faith (*īmān*) of the vast majority of Muslims is bound to continue in strength if not always in depth and the tradition on both its external and inward dimensions as Law and Way, will remain a living reality. The intellectual and spiritual traditions of Islam, whose expressions have been renewed and whose activities have been revived in the latter half of the twentieth century are also bound to continue their process of rejuvenation and revival especially among modern educated Muslims while they will be of ever greater attraction to non-Muslims in quest of wisdom and means for its attainment. Likewise, the process of the revival of traditional Islamic art is bound to continue even in face of the onslaught of secularist art and culture in the Islamic world. Moreover, the spread of Islam globally, and especially in America, seems most likely to continue while the newly established Islamic communities in the West continue to struggle in order to establish themselves as they try to guard their authenticity and to sink their roots in the new soil and land in which they have been planted.

At the same time the crises alluded to above in the intellectual, cultural and social domains are bound to persist. As the Muslim intelligentsia seriously rooted in the Islamic tradition becomes more deeply aware of the nature of modern and post-

modern thought in all domains ranging from philosophy to the natural sciences to the humanities and social sciences, Islamic answers provided to these intellectual challenges are bound to grow in depth and seriousness. It seems most unlikely, however, that the tension and confrontation observable in the intellectual and educational domains can be overcome any time soon especially since the disorder and even chaos of modern Western civilization is reflected almost immediately within the non-Western worlds, including of course the Islamic, and the Islamic world does not enjoy the privilege of isolating itself in order to solve its own problems. The fact that during the 20th century the West has always decided the agenda even if other civilizations have mustered the strength to participate in serious intellectual and cultural dialogue is bound to continue in the future.

As for culture, most likely in the near future it will be the popular culture especially of American origin that will be a major challenge to Islamic society as it mesmerizes the youth across the width and breadth of the Islamic world. If anything, this flood is bound to become even more extended in the future as a result of the much more intrusive means of communication which are even now spreading from cities and towns to villages in the Atlas mountains and Anatolia, the forests of Bangladesh and far away islands of Indonesia. The effort spent by Muslims from religious scholars, educators and parents to governments to combat the erosive influence of much of this imported popular culture will almost certainly continue to consume much of the energy of the Islamic community.

On the social plane the trends of the past few decades including increasing urbanism and the pressure to break down the traditional family structures coming from various forms of feminism and various stresses of the modern style of living, are bound to continue although in these domains more Islamic responses are likely. In the late 20th century most feminists in the Islamic world were from the modernized classes and not especially noted for their religious devotion. Most likely the trend toward an "Islamic form of feminism," if such a term is still appropriate to use, will become more strengthened as will

the greater participation of fully practicing and pious Muslim women in social and economic activities outside the home as one can see even in a country such as Iran where a political revolution in the name of Islam has already occurred. Likewise, the new urban classes, coming from more pious layers of Islamic society than the older upper classes in urban areas are bound to strengthen rather than weaken the Islamic presence in cities despite the uprooting which urban growth at the expense of the countryside implies.

In the domain of economics and politics it is difficult to see how in the foreseeable future a completely stable situation can be created. In the economic field, Islamic ideals and practices have to contend with a much more powerful so-called global economic order and must remain content with creating islands here and there where Islamic economic theories can be put to practice and also with seeking to preserve as much as possible what remains of traditional Islamic economic practices in the bazaars as well as the countryside. There is no doubt, however, that many Muslims, even those living in the West, will seek to relate economics to ethics and will refuse to allow economics to be ever considered in principle as a legitimate field independent of ethical and hence religious concerns.

As for the political situation, the tensions and turmoils of the past decades and in fact since the colonial period are bound to continue as long as the Islamic world is not really independent. On the one hand areas still under foreign rule and annexed by colonial expansion during the past few centuries, ranging from certain parts of the Balkans to the northern Caucasus, to Palestine, to Kashmir, to Western China, which until the 19th century was Eastern Turkistan, to the southern Philippines are bound to be witness to continuous tension and strife until political problems are solved on the basis of sovereignty of the will of the people living in these lands. On the other hand within the main areas of the Islamic world contention between traditional, so-called fundamentalist and modernized or secularist groups are bound to continue and are most likely to spread. The question of the meaning of an Islamic

state, Islamic democracy, the rule of God's religion vis-à-vis the rule of the people, the meaning and role of secularism, the relation between religion and the state, the unity of the Islamic world versus local national authority and many other central issues are bound to be continuously debated leading from time to time to external conflict as a result of constraints within Islamic societies as well as pressures exerted upon the Islamic world from the outside.

As far as religion in its most central sense is concerned, the most important challenges to Islam are bound to continue to be on the one hand that of secularism in all its forms including philosophical skepticism and scientistic naturalism and materialism (despite the loss of the significance of the term matter in modern physics) and on the other the diversity of religions or religious pluralism. As the Islamic world plunges into civilizational dialogue and religious discourse with other religions on a more public scale, many of the most important new chapters in Islamic thought will probably be devoted to the subject of the unity and diversity of religions and all the issues ranging from the metaphysical to the ethical that are involved in this all important issue. This inter-religious discourse is also likely to be complemented by a greater intensity of dialogue among various schools within Islam itself, especially Sunnism and Shi^{c}ism, and movements to create greater accord between these major interpretations of Islam during the past few decades are bound to continue and grow in strength in the future.

These and other issues and factors are likely to continue to push forth new manifestations and flowerings of Sufism, its spiritual teachings (along with other aspects of Islamic esoteric teachings as contained in Shi^{c}ism), its philosophy so pertinent to the understanding of religious diversity, and its art and literature. As already mentioned, while during the past century both so-called fundamentalists and modernists in the Islamic world opposed Sufism, during the past few decades a new wave of interest in Sufism has been observable in many Islamic countries while in the West it has been primarily through Sufism that Westerners have come to gain a grasp of the deeper mean-

ing of Islam. While opposition to Sufism is bound to continue in certain circles, its spread both within and outside the Islamic world is also most likely to continue and even accelerate. The incredible interest in America in the poetry of one of the greatest masters of Sufism, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, even if it be an Americanized version of Rūmī, is not a passing fad but most likely a sign of the ever more extensive influence of Sufism and its teachings in the West where it provides a path towards perfection for those qualified to follow it and also the means for recollection of much that has been lost for those Christians and Jews seeking to re-discover the deeper dimensions of their own tradition. Within the Islamic world itself, Sufism and other philosophies issuing from the esoteric dimension of the Islamic revelation such as Shi^{c}ite gnosis (*^{c}irfān-i shī^{c}ī*) are alone capable of providing answers to many of the philosophical challenges of modernism as well as the challenge of taking into serious consideration the presence of other forms of the Sacred. This source is therefore bound to be tapped to an ever greater degree in future years as Muslims grapple more seriously with questions of the presence of two "others," one the secular which denies the validity of all religious views and the second, religious views of reality other than the Islamic.

Having said all of this, it is necessary to remember, however, the principle so emphasized in Islam that the future is known to God alone. All human extrapolations in fact shall fall short with the smallest unforeseen perturbation. The so-called predictions of futurologists are there to bear witness to this assertion. All the projections made here are therefore made with the utmost humility and with full awareness of the fragility of human existence and the possibility of unforeseen factors which can burst at any moment upon the scene in completely unpredictable ways. This is particularly true of our age in which signs of the latter days predicted by the Prophet and the saints of Islam are manifest everywhere, an age which seems so pregnant with momentous events beyond our ken. But even such projections cannot be made categorically, if one remembers the saying of the Prophet that all those who predict the Hour

are liars. Even if we know that it is the eleventh hour, according to Islam only God knows when the clock will strike twelve o'clock.

All that one can say is that Islam is likely to remain a powerful religious force in the coming future, a challenge to secularism in all its forms as secularism will remain a challenge to it. Islam is bound to struggle with forces which negate its reality within and without and is most likely to draw ever closer to other religions, especially its monotheistic sisters, Judaism and Christianity, but even beyond them to all religions which share with it acceptance of the Transcendent, the sense of the Sacred and understanding of the ultimately spiritual nature of man as well as the spiritual significance of all of creation. As to how exactly the forces of religion and secularism will contend with each other on the stage of cosmic history and how Islam will create better understanding and bring about mutual understanding with other religions in the future while preserving its integrity, one can only repeat the formula with which traditional Islamic treatises usually conclude, that is, "And God knows best."

CHAPTER 13

REFLECTIONS ON ISLAM AND THE WEST: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

In conclusion we wish to reflect and meditate on the question of the relation between Islam and the West in the future on the basis of the past. In discussing this most important and timely issue, and in light of what has already been paid, we must pause and ask again what we mean by the two terms Islam and the West. Which Islam and which West are we considering? Is it traditional Islam as practiced by the majority of Muslims, the Islam of pious men and women who seek to live in the light of God's teachings as revealed in the Quran and in surrender to His will? Or is it modernist interpretations that seek to interpret the Islamic tradition in view of currently prevalent Western ideas and fashions of thought? Or yet, is it the extreme forms of politically active Islam that, in exasperation, before dominance by non-Islamic forces both outside and inside the borders of most Islamic countries, takes recourse to ideas and methods of certain strands of recent Western political history, including, in some cases, terrorism, which is against Islamic law and which was not invented by them?

Nor is the reality of the West in any way homogeneous. In fact, practically the only political unity observed in the West these days appears in the hatred of Islam, as shown in the case

of Bosnia and Chechnya, where one observed for a long time, with very few exceptions, the uniformity of silence, indifference, and inaction by various voices in the West in the face of the worst kind of human atrocities. Otherwise, the opposition of forces and diversity of what is usually called the West is so blatant as to hardly need mention. But since it is ignored in many quarters that speak of global order based on what they call Western values, it must be asked if the West is characterized by Trappist and Carthusian monks or European and American agnostic or atheistic "intellectuals" on university campuses or in the media. One wonders if the Westerners are those who still make pilgrimage to Lourdes in the thousands, or those who journey, also in the thousands, to Las Vegas or the home of Elvis Presley. This diversity and even confrontation within the West is of the greatest importance not only for those in Europe and the United States who speak of confrontation with the Islamic world on the basis of the idea that there is an at least relatively unified West, but also for the Muslims, at least some of whom are in general fully aware of deep divisions not likely to be integrated into unity soon but which are in fact on the verge of creating disorder and chaos within the very fabric of Western societies.

Also, religiously speaking, the diversity in the two worlds is not of the same degree. The vast majority of the Islamic world still lives within the Islamic worldview. Everyone considers the Quran as the Word of God, the Prophet as His messenger, and the reality of God, His Names and Attributes as unquestioned realities. In contrast, in the West, beyond common commercial interests of various nations and groups that unify them, there is a much greater division concerning the most fundamental issues, such as the reality or denial of the reality of God, the origin of humanity, the nature and origin of ethics, and even the sacredness and the origin of life itself, over which some people are willing to kill those whom they consider to be participating in murder by terminating the life of a fetus. Muslims might be fighting over the question of political authority and the types of laws that should govern Islamic society, but very few differ con-

cerning the belief that God is still sitting on His Throne (al-*ʿarsh*) and is the ruler of the universe.

On the contrary, in the West there is less political fighting today after several centuries of bloody revolutions and upheavals, but there is also the deepest struggle and almost revolution on the question of values and ethics, not to speak of theology itself. On both sides of the debate concerning Islam and the West, it is important to remember these and many other dimensions and forms of diversity, although in this essay it is not possible to deal in depth with them. Lest one forget, it must be recalled that even on the question of the nature of the Bible and its meaning, there is more difference between people of the Bible belt and many skeptical and deconstructionist professors in the universities in that very region than there is between the view of the former and what Muslims consider the Bible to be throughout the whole of the Islamic world.

The Historical Background

Such was not the case in days past, especially during the European Middle Ages when the West faced the Islamic world for the first time. First of all, this was a period in which the West and the Islamic world shared the most important of all principles, namely, the acceptance of the Divine Reality beyond all worldly concerns and principles, beyond individualism and an earth-bound humanism. Second, the two civilizations respected each other, even if enmity existed among them on a certain plane. The two made their own arms and were more or less evenly matched on the military and political planes, in sharp contrast to what is observable today. If the West called Muslims "heathens," it nevertheless respected Islamic civilization to the extent of emulating much of its science and philosophy, art and architecture, literature and mystical symbols, as well as some of its major institutions, such as colleges of eduction. Even the medieval blue mantles of the Holy Virgin bear epigraphy as ornamentation that looks like Arabic without actually being so. Dante would incorporate the structure of the Islamic spiritual universe into the architecture of that most

Christian of poems, The Divine Comedy, which recapitulates the whole vision and experience of medieval European man, and Roger Bacon would wear Islamic dress once a year at Oxford when he was lecturing on Islamic illuminationist doctrines. Despite theological anathema cast against Islam and the Crusades that caused great death and destruction, medieval Europe looked with respect upon the only "other" it knew, that is, Islam and its society and civilization.

Open hatred of Islam, both intellectual and theological, really began with the Renaissance, which also deplored its own medieval past. The writings of such major figures as Petrarch, which were central in the formation of the worldview of the Renaissance, show a venom and hatred of Islam and Islamic learning not to be found in any major medieval authors. This was the period of humanism in the nonreligious sense of the term—anthropomorphism, opposition to the certitude brought about by faith, individualism based upon rebellion against all higher authority, and also Eurocentrism, all of which have characterized the Western worldview ever since. These ideas stood not only against the West's religious heritage, but even more so against Islam, which has always opposed severely any titanic and Promethean view of humanity and has emphasized man's humble state before the grandeur and majesty of the Divine, seeing him at once as the servant of God (*ʿabd Allāh*) and His vicegerent (*khalīfat Allāh*) on earth.

It was during this period that the two sister civilizations parted ways and, based upon the religious opposition to Islam in the Middle Ages, a new and much more embracing wave of hatred was created against all things Islamic, resulting in an attitude of detestation, an air of superiority and apprehension, which have survived sometimes even unconsciously in mainstream Western attitude toward Islam to this day, although there is no comparison between the military and material might of the West and that of the Islamic world today. Therefore, although opposition to Islam in the West begins in the period of crystallization of Western civilization during the Middle Ages when Islam was the only "other" for the West, the

seeds of the deep hatred and air of superiority of recent centuries must be traced to the Renaissance and its aftermath—to a period of history when the West set upon a path of secularization, worldly power, and unprecedented commercialism and cultivated a new image of humanity that was diametrically opposed to all that for which Islam stood and still stands.

This period provided the basis from which the modern West looked upon the Islamic world during the colonial period, an attitude which, in a sense, still continues in new ways in many places to this day, at least economically, technologically, and even culturally. In modern times, however, a new element entered upon the scene. Instead of simply casting anathemas upon Islam as a Christian heresy, new analyses of Islam became based on either missionary prejudice or secular rationalism, which had developed in the West and, when combined with superior military power, became a formidable instrument for the dissection and ultimate strangulation of religions and religious cultures in the name of a supposedly universal science. Muslims could not study and present their teachings and views concerning Christianity anywhere in the West, whereas Westerners took it upon themselves not only to analyze and criticize Islam as they willed, but even to force their teachings upon Muslims themselves through schools created for either Christian or Western secularist education and supported by Western economic and political power. The Quran was and continues to be analyzed and criticized in the West not as the verbatim Word of God, as Muslims believe, but as simply a human compilation to be rent asunder by rationalistic and historicist methods. It is as if Muslims were to search for the DNA of Christ's blood and try, God forbid, to match it with the blood of Joseph and then come up with all kinds of theories which they would teach in exclusive schools in the West, supported by oil money, in which the most intelligent Western students would study in order to qualify for the best jobs.

It is in light of this whole lack of parallelism and complete inequality on the material plane, in which the West dictates, more or less, the agendas of the Islamic countries and judges

them only on the basis of the extent to which they accept passing Western norms, now called, euphemistically, "global," that the present relation between Islam and the West must be viewed. Many new elements have arisen of late, including the revival of Islam within the Islamic world and the pressure of the West for complete cultural domination, while the Renaissance paradigm, which has dictated the modern Western view of things, is itself falling apart along with ever-increasing social chaos. Still, the historical background of the relation between Islam and the West in the medieval Renaissance, and the more recent modern periods must always be kept in mind, because they constitute a depository of historical memories to which interested parties and groups can always appeal to fan the fire of hatred and to create a false image of a powerful enemy—as if Islam today had the comparative power vis-à-vis the West as did the Umayyads or the Ottomans.

It is in light of the historical past that one must pose the question as to what constitutes the real problems today as far as the relation between Islam and the West is concerned. If, in this analysis, we address mostly the Western rather than Islamic components of this confrontation, which one hopes will become more and more a dialogue, it is because in this section we have mostly the Western and Western oriented reader in mind, and also because there is no common measure between the threats that the modern West poses for the whole existence of Islam and its civilization and the threats, in reality and not as propaganda carried out by some of the media, that Islam poses for the West.

The Elements of Conflict Today

The basic reality underlying the relation of Islam and the West is the already mentioned fact that, in contrast to earlier Western expectations, the Islamic religion is still fully vibrant and Islamic civilization is still alive, even if greatly weakened. In contrast to all those late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western students of Islam, especially missionaries, who predicted the imminent demise of Islam, the religion shows

much more vitality today than many others. The very existence of the Islamic world, which negates so many assumptions of the postmedieval and modern Western worldview, such as individualism, secular humanism, and the superiority of human rights over divine rights and humanly devised laws over Divine Law, appears as a formidable challenge to a West that considers its own historical development as the only acceptable path to follow for all other peoples on the globe. Otherwise, they are branded as medieval and backward and are identified with all kinds of other pejorative connotations prevalent in the modern world. Were Islam to have simply surrendered to Western patterns of thinking and acting, as do so many Muslim modernists, there would have been no confrontation between the two worlds.

The reason for the conflict is the very reality of another civilization that wishes to follow its own principles and develop according to its own inner life and dynamic rather than on the basis of externally imposed norms that, according to many voices, now threaten the West itself. Today, the situation is not like the period of the cold war, when the West and the communist worlds were threatening each other's very existence, for the Islamic world cannot and does not threaten the West militarily, politically, or even economically in any conceivable way. On the contrary, the West controls the most vital economic resources of Muslim nations, benefits from all conflicts in that world through the sale of vast quantities of arms, and practically dictates its wishes in many parts of the Islamic world.

In debates about the threat of the Islamic world, rarely do the Western media present the real issues of basic importance in Muslim eyes, such as the loss of Muslim lands, especially in Palestine, on the basis of exclusive historic claims that deny the claims of the other side. These historical claims are, in fact, of such a nature that were they to be pursued elsewhere they would, through the same logic, require non-native Americans to return to its original inhabitants much of the land captured only a century or two ago through one of the most successful conquests in human history of the type that some now call "eth-

nic cleansing." How tragic it is that Jews and Muslims could have lived in harmony with each other in days of old but cannot do so in the future if one accepts this exclusivist logic without considering the views of the other side of the confrontation. Other issues include the fact that many nations in the West not only control the most important economic asset of much of the Islamic world—oil—but also want in a thousand and one ways to recover the money they have paid for it, whether through the sale of arms or the creation of safe markets.

Nor is the West, in the sense of Western governments and of course not well-meaning individuals and organizations, seriously interested in the welfare of the Islamic world, unless it coincides, as is to be expected, with its own geopolitical and economic interests, as seen so clearly in the attitude of the West toward democracy in the Islamic world or the unbelievably hypocritical manner in which concerns for human rights are applied whenever it is to the interest of this or that power but never when it goes against the political and commercial interests of those same powers. How many people who keep talking about Islamic terrorist threats ever bother to ask why a twenty-year-old person should, at the prime of his youth, give up his/her life so easily and so voluntarily? What is lacking that causes such extreme actions? Terrorism of any kind, whether committed by Muslims, Christians or Jews, is heinous and against the teachings of all three religions. When it does occur, it is necessary not only to condemn it, which one must, but also to go behind the immediate events and ask why such acts are being or have been carried out. Today, as far as the Islamic world is concerned, the causes behind such terrible acts are the loss of hope, unbearable pressures (often supported directly or indirectly by the West), and desperation before forces that are destroying one's religion and civilization. Hatred is a fire that consumes and annihilates, but the fire cannot be put out unless one inquires about its causes. Otherwise, as soon as one fire is put out another is ignited.

There is no possibility of creating understanding between the West and the Islamic world until, on the Western side, peo-

ple realize that the very absolutization of the West's particular worldview at a particular moment in time, when combined with powerful economic "interests" that are usually against the interest of others, bring about impatience with and even hatred of other worldviews. This has happened to such an extent that today many people in the West who are opposed to friendship with the Islamic world, because of their own political or economic agendas, also oppose any mention of the harmony and peace that dominated most of the life of Jews and Christians within the Islamic world before modern times. They even seek to arouse Christian and Jewish enmity against Islam, although many of them are not themselves, for the most part, serious followers of either religion.

As for Muslims, they must stop identifying the aggressively secularist force and crass commercial interests of the West with the whole of the West and remember that, although the West is predominantly secular, there has survived in the West to this day important Christian and also Jewish elements whose worldviews, despite transient worldly interests in some quarters, are close to that of Islam. Between the Islamic world and the secularist West there can be no deep harmony and accord, for there are no common transcendent principles between them, just as there are none between Hindus and Confucians or Buddhists and the secularist worldview. There can only be peace based upon mutual respect on the human level. Needless to say, this respect is not given by many Westerners to any Muslims who, rather than emulating a West lost to an even greater degree in the maze of its own errors, seek to live Islamically in a serious manner. Nor are they given by most Muslims to Westerners with spiritual principles—with the major difference, however, that Islam is not a threat to the Western way of life but only to Western interests within the Islamic world itself. Tapes of the Quran are not about to invade the airwaves of Europe and the United States as the crudest products of Western pop culture are invading the East, while Western secularism is seeking in a virulently aggressive manner to impose not only its technology, but also its half-dying

worldview, through that technology, upon the non-Western world, especially the Islamic.

To Overcome Obstacles to Understanding

It is here that, for people of good faith on both sides of this divide and also for Christians living in the Islamic world and Muslims living in the West, a more profound question, as far as its long-term impact is concerned, arises. It is the question of understanding and accord between Islam and Christianity, and to the extent possible Judaism, both across the frontiers of the West and the Islamic world and also within their borders. The Muslims, whom the Serbs and Russians were massacring until recently in the name of Christianity, have a lot more in common with the Serbs as far as religion is concerned, as exemplified by such Orthodox masters as St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory of Palamas, than do the Serbs with many not only secularized Westerners but also completely modernized Christians, some of whom admit freely that they do not even believe in the virgin birth of Christ or his historical authenticity, to which Muslims cling as truths revealed in the Quran. To talk of the West and Islam and to identify characteristically the modern West with Christianity, which it has enfeebled to the degree observable today, is to gloss over a cleavage that would make all serious mutual understanding well-nigh impossible.

It is true that modernism has marginalized Christianity to an ever-greater degree since the Renaissance. Yet Christianity, as well as Judaism in the West, continue to survive as living realities and in its evangelical form at least there has been even a revival of Christianity in recent time in the Occident. If one looks at the situation in depth, one sees that they have a great deal more in common with Muslims who believe in God, accept the moral injunctions of the Ten Commandments and seek to live a life centered upon prayer and the reality of the other world to which Christ referred in that most forgotten of his utterances, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," than with people whose mother tongue is English, French, German, or some other European language but who share nothing of the

Christian worldview, whether it be of this world or the next. If a new awareness of this truth is to be created in the context of the present anti-Islamic current in the West, which speaks sometimes as if we were living at the time of St. Bernard of Clairvaux rather than of deconstructionism, relativism, and a general hatred of serious religion, which is tolerated only if completely divorced from public life, there would be a greater possibility for a serious accord between most of the Islamic world and, at least, a West if not what is called the West as defined by economic and geopolitical interests that are pursued at all costs, whether these "interests" also accord with the interests of others or not. The achievement of this awareness is so laudable that it must be pursued fully by all people of good faith on both sides, despite many obstacles on the way.

On the Christian side, the first important consideration is, of course, a theological one. Despite so many ecumenical meetings since the Second World War between Christians and Muslims, sometimes along with Jews, few Christians accept Islam as an authentic religion or revelation and the Prophet as the receiver of a major message from Heaven coming after Christ. There is much diplomatic courtesy, but little theological acceptance, especially by more traditional and conservative elements of Christianity, who are, in fact, closest to Muslims and best understand the meaning of a sacred scripture that is immutable and of divine origin and of ethical laws that, coming from God, are not meant to evolve with "the times" but to determine "the times" whenever and wherever they might be. This tragic paradox is similar to the case of the environment, in which conservative Christians, who emphasize more than others the sanctity of human life from its conception in the mother's womb, are much more indifferent to forces that are destroying the whole natural environment and the web of life that supports also human life, than many of those who would have difficulty with the very notion of the Sacred.

Granted, accepting the authenticity of Islam is more difficult for Christianity than the acceptance of the authenticity of Christianity is for Islam, which, while denying the Trinity and

Incarnation, accepts the divine origin of the Christic message and considers Christ as the supreme prophet of inwardness preceding the Prophet of Islam. Nevertheless, the question of mutual acceptance must be faced squarely. The greatest support in the world today for traditional Christian and Jewish beliefs comes from Islam and, in fact, throughout the ages Islam has permitted its Jewish and Christian minorities in its midst to practice their religion freely, the result of which is witnessed by the depth of piety and authenticity of eastern Christianity and Oriental Judaism today.

The task that lies ahead is for religious leaders of the three religions to realize and have the courage to assert these truths, despite the tragic problems of Palestine that have cast such a shadow upon Muslim-Jewish relations and a triumphalism in certain quarters that would still seek to prove the glory of Christianity through the fact that it was the religion of a civilization that became the most powerful—but at the same time the most secularized—civilization in the world. From the Islamic point of view, how tragic it is that while Muslims protected the Jewish people throughout most of their history and provided a haven for them after their expulsion from Spain after the Reconquest, they have had to pay so dearly for the barbaric atrocities of Hitler. Likewise, how sad it is to observe that, even at the height of their power and before the modern colonial period, Muslims never practiced "ethnic cleansing" against the many Christian minorities in their midst; they recently had to suffer a new wave of ethnic cleansing similar to that of Spain after 1492, while the official modern West—and of course not the many concerned Westerners, the West that declares loudly to be the champion of human rights—looked on for a long time without taking a single serious step because those being cleansed in Bosnia or massacred in Chechnya were Muslims and not Christians or Jews.

Despite these tragedies that have darkened the scene, the attempt must nevertheless be made by Christian and Jewish leaders on one side, and Islamic leaders on the other, to reach a profound accord not on the basis of a secular humanism that

has already demonstrated its poverty, nor of simple political niceties carried out for the sake of expediency, but on the foundation of the certitude that the followers of these religions are all the children of Abraham and pray to the same God. Muslim leaders, as well as Jewish and Christian ones, bear the deep responsibility of undertaking every effort possible in this direction. More specifically, Muslims, often wary of ecumenical discussions because of their subsequent results and effects, must realize how difficult the task of the acceptance of Islam as an authentic revelation is for a serious Christian theologian and not simply castigate the Christian because he cannot accept the authenticity of the Islamic revelation as easily as can Islam the revelations of Judaism and Christianity.

A second major obstacle that affects the whole of the modern West, much of modernized Christianity and, to some extent, Western Judaism, is the assumption that all civilization must follow the secularizing trajectory of Western history since the Renaissance. In fact, most of the dialogue carried out between Christians and Muslims today is colored by the presence of that silent third partner: anti-religious secularism. The debate is not like the one in which Nicholas of Cusa participated at the end of the fifteenth century. How easier would it have been, in fact, if a Ghazzālī, a Maimonides, and a St. Thomas were to carry out religious dialogue! From the Islamic point of view, what is difficult to understand is how various tenets of Christianity are changing so rapidly to the extent that some want to change the name and gender of Christ, whom they now call Christa. When modernism began, Christianity, especially in its Catholic form, stood as the critic and opponent of modernism, whereas now many voices in the churches have become accomplices to the spread of the very ideas that have opposed the most fundamental tenets of the authentic Christian faith. The result is the constant change of even basic elements of the faith, so that it is difficult to understand with whom one is dialoguing. On the one hand, Christianity presents itself to Islam as a powerful spiritual force that, in reality, still dominates the West and its value system, and, on the other hand, under the pressure of modern

secularist ideas, much of Christian theology is changing with incredible rapidity, and what has survived of Christian ethics in Western society is disappearing with an unprecedented speed.

The present situation is one in which Islam still sees God as sitting upon "His Throne" (*al-ᶜarsh*) ruling over the universe and Islamic society as one in which the practice of religion is so intense as to incorporate the whole of life, and where the vast majority of Muslims still perform their daily prayers, fast, and perform other rites promulgated by the Divine Law (*Shariᶜah*). In the West, in contrast, many question the very nature and function of God, and in many European countries only about 10 percent of the people attend church at least once a week. Rarely is this great difference of actual practice of religion taken into account in current inter-religious dialogue, and the agenda is carried out in which many Christians simply identify themselves with the West, as if the case of religion in the two worlds were the same. It is as if a country in Africa or Asia were to carry out trade talks with the United States without paying any attention to the present disparity in economic activities in the two countries.

As in the case of trade, so in the case of religion. The actual religious situation must be considered and such baseless slogans as Islam being medieval and Christianity being modern must be put aside, at least by serious Christian thinkers. When France was medieval, it was called the elder daughter of the Church and produced great theologians, Christian art, and deep piety, whereas today only 10 percent of French people go to church regularly. St. Thomas Aquinas has been succeeded at the Sorborne by such men as Derrida and Foucault, and Notre Dame has been "superseded" by the Centre Pompidou! Christian thinkers, at least Catholic and Orthodox ones, should be the last to try to look upon Islam in a pejorative and degrading manner by calling it "medieval" or expecting Islam to undergo a so-called reform that would simply follow the path of the West, ending up with an officially Lutheran Sweden, in which church attendance a few years ago was less than 5 percent. A new appreciation of the eternal values of religion and the sapi-

ence that lies at its heart must be cultivated to allow serious dialogue to take place with Islam, one which would also strengthen what remains of traditional religions in the Occident.

Finally, a third major obstacle to be confronted is missionary activity, not as it was practiced in the days of old, but as it has been practiced by Western Christian missionaries since the colonial period and to this day. Both Christianity and Islam are traveling religions that claim to bear a global message, and neither religion can demand from the other that it discontinue "preaching unto the nations." In the days of old, the material power behind the religious message of the two religions was more or less the same, in total contrast to what one observes today, where Western Christianity missionary activity in the Islamic world is accompanied often, but not always, by enticement of the most worldly kind, usually relying upon the products of the very civilization that has marginalized Christianity. There is usually a Bible in one hand and syringes or sacks of rice in the other, along with a schooling system that is more successful in secularizing than Christianizing its students. There are, of course, remarkable exceptions, but not all the missionaries are a Père de Foucault who, living in poverty, went into the North African desert to be a witness of Christ among Muslims. Rather, in many areas missionary activity continues to be the instrument of Western secular interests, as it was during the colonial period. Almost everywhere in Africa and Asia converted populations are as much protagonists of the secularized modern West as they are of the message of Christ, which they often understand in an already secularized form.

It is interesting to note in this context that Eastern Christians have not usually displayed the same missionary zeal as Western Christians, whose aggressive missionary spirit is due not only to Christianity but also to the Graeco-Roman civilization, for which everyone other than themselves was a barbarian. This fact was also demonstrated in that Christian and Jewish heresy, Marxism and communism, and continues to be seen in the zeal with which secular humanists, no longer

defending Christianity, go about with the same missionary zeal within the Islamic world to convert the Muslims to the secularist perspective. These several types of missionary activity, in fact, meet in some places, such as in American and European institutions of learning in the Islamic world, many of which started as Christian missionary schools and are now supposedly bastions of secularist education.

To understand how great an obstacle is the missionary issue in the context of its being wed to the modern West and its being supported by great wealth created by means of modern finance and technology that, to put it mildly, have little to do with Christian poverty, one should look for a moment at the situation if roles were reversed. How would devout Christians feel if Islam carried out missionary activity not from the position of worldly weakness, as it does now as Christians did in the Roman empire, but from the position of incomparable economic strength? How would they react if Muslims invited Christians to dialogue while promising anyone who embraced Islam free oil for their cars, free hospital care, and access to an educational system that would guarantee them high position in their countries, whose governments were so much under the influence of the Islamic world that they could not stop such types of aggressive missionary activity?

There is no doubt that these obstacles exist, but from both the Western Christian and Muslim side there must be an attempt to overcome them if there is to be any real accord and peace between the two sides. Muslims, especially, while acting from the background of much greater weakness politically, economically, and militarily, must nevertheless open all the doors possible to genuine dialogue and understanding with those Christians who put the kingdom of God above that of Caesar. How sad it is that many of the most devout Muslims are distrustful of even well-intentioned Christians, whom they identify simply with the modern West, concerning which they have the right to be suspicious. How tragic that in the West the more conservative and traditional a Christian, the more he is likely to be ignorant of Islam, while some leaders of such groups

describe Islam in terms of the anti-Christ. Ecumenism then often remains in the hands of those who are willing to change the very foundations of their faith to bring about worldly understanding with followers of other religions, or one might say those who would readily sacrifice that peace "which passeth all understanding," that is, peace with God and in God, for a worldly peace that God does not allow anyway under these conditions, for there can never be peace on earth without harmony and peace with Heaven.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, it is necessary to assert once again that, for those seriously concerned with the future of humanity and not simply with passing exigencies in addition to egotistical calculations and short-term "interests," the question of Islam and the West must be cast in a new mold. Both sides must understand that there cannot be an integration of two diametrically opposed worldviews, that is, Islam and modern secularism, but, as mentioned, at best mutual and not simply one-sided respect on the human level and the creation of a modus vivendi based upon lack of aggression of one side against the other, which includes refraining from plundering the wealth and the land and seeking to demolish the culture of the other side. But both Islam and the West must also understand that there can be, and in fact needs to be, a true meeting of minds and hearts between Christians, Jews, and Muslims who, after all, share many fundamental principles of their respective worldviews and who all face a much greater danger of a mortal threat from Western secularist culture, including its outposts in the Islamic world, than they do from each other.

To accomplish this end, the atmosphere must be cleared through earnest effort on all sides, and such terms as fundamentalism, extremism, and radicalism must be restudied and defined not in the light of immediate political interests but of the truth. The practice of first anathematizing and demonizing a word and then simply using it against whomever one does not like at the moment is hardly the way of achieving any under-

standing or accord. What is needed is, indeed, the truth of that peace of which Christ spoke as being immanent to man's nature and that Muslims identify as one of the Names of God. It is only the shining of the light of truth upon the dark clouds of today's horizon that can make possible an accord between the people of faith in both worlds. Furthermore, one hopes, on the basis of such an accord, that a way of living and acting between Islam and the West would come about based upon mutual respect rather than greed parading as human concern or hatred passing itself as religious righteousness.

In any case, as Christians well know, what God has united should not and cannot be rent asunder by human beings. The destiny of the West, and especially the Christian West, as well as Judaism, and Islam are intertwined and connected by profound bonds that cannot be severed in the long run and can only be loosened temporarily at great cost to all. Let us hope that the current situation will provide the opportunity for people of good intentions on both sides to pursue the vital issue of relations between Islam and the West in light of permanent truths and not transient whims and fancies based upon the desire for power, greed and self-assertion.

wa'Llāhu a'lam

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This book is one of the most important writings of the author on the subject of the encounter and interrelation between Islam and modernism. Addressed at once to Muslims and Westerners, the author deals in depth with the intellectual and spiritual crisis of modern man as well as the dilemmas of the contemporary Muslim faced with the daunting challenge of the modern world. He charters a path for mutual understanding between Muslims and traditional elements of Western society as well as providing, on the basis of Islamic sapiental doctrines, criteria for judging various facets of modernism. The situation of Islam in the contemporary Muslim world is treated critically and in the postscript the author meditates upon the future of Islam and the Islamic world in light of the unprecedented challenges which the modern world poses for Muslims.

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UNESCO has declared the year 2001 as the Year of Civilizational Dialogue to which this book primarily addresses itself.

Published by
ABC International Group, Inc.
Distributed by
KAZI Publications, Inc.
3023 W. Belmont Avenue
Chicago IL 60618

Islam and the Plight of Modern Man
Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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