BETWEEN SECULAR PLURALISM AND RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM

SOME OBSERVATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF PEACE, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE RELIGIOUS OTHER

Mr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar[*]

The present day world is a strange mixture of the vestiges and outposts of secular late/high modernity, postmodern mindset and "beyond the postmodern" frontier thinking with its divergent trends of engaging with the Sacred, its ideas about the human condition and dealing with the question of Reality. Cultures and their worldviews are ruled by their mandarins, the intellectuals, and they, as well as their institutions that shape the minds that ruled the modern world— and continue to hold sway in the postmodern (and beyond the postmodern) milieu— are unreservedly secular. One, therefore, often encounters the argument, and at times it turns into an objection, that a misleading picture is being presented by bringing in religion and spirituality as a stake holder in discussions on "building democratic structures", contours of "a South Asian sensibility", as well as the questions of "human functioning and social responsibility" and "new relationship between humans, nature and production to sustain life"; the themes that are being addressed in our discussions. Both within and without the Islamic faith, many would make such an observation and the secular mindset is, obviously, averse to it. But if the ground realities are taken into consideration, these alert us to another situation.

We live for the first time in history in an age of multiculturalism and it is utterly important and central that we think in plural terms about faith. The most towering problem facing people in the 19th century was

[*] Director, Iqbal Academy Lahore, Pakistan

nationalism and in the 20th century it had been ideology as, for most of the century, the nations were located on the opposite sides of the ideological divide and the cold war conflict. But now when the war is gone and the ideological conflict is over, the greatest problem that faces the 21st century is the ethnic conflict and because those conflicts are powered, in part, by multiple faiths clashing with one another it is important that we turn over attention to that danger and do our best to annihilate whatever problems in our human collectivities that we face now or that may come down the road.

I would offer a few observations in relation to the ground realities of the situation. Since everyone comes to the discussion with one's own specific tool kit and training I would exclude all practical considerations and try to say something philosophically or theologically as, like the medieval Muslims, Christians and traditional Hindus, I too consider philosophy to be the long arm of theology and see religious arguments at work behind attitudes and actions and societal behaviours that apparently seem to have nothing in common with religion, even in mundane matters like the way Muslim, Hindu and Christian males treat their females! Moreover I do not agree with the way mostly common responses are made to the misplaced religious arguments and bad logic used by the present day extremist Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Most often the response is made by dissociating oneself from the monstrosities by saying that this is not true Islam or this is not true Hinduism or Christianity. But that amounts to side stepping the question and turning a blind eye to the fact that the groups in question from among all the faith communities are putting forward religious arguments to validate their actions and the conceptual framework and basic assumptions through which these operate are claimed to be supported by their basic religious texts. In this case one cannot absolve oneself of one's responsibility by simply disowning the group or groups in question. One must place the sin at the doorsteps of a definite group, school of thought or mode of interpretation in one's community and try to hold a mirror to their thinking.[1]

Until quite recently, most of the writers tended to keep religion out of their scenarios of the future. Today, projections of a simply secular future seem less persuasive. The shift in perception could have diverse reasons but one might argue that this perception is just catching up with the reality obscured by the expansion of Communism earlier in the twentieth century and by the influence, especially in the media and

education, of a largely secularized Western-educated elite throughout that period. Probably between 4 and 5 billion of the world's more than 6 billion people are directly involved with a religion today, and this picture seems unlikely to change a great deal during the rest of the twenty-first century. So during the lifetimes of all of us now alive we would do well to reckon seriously with religions as shapers of our world, for worse or for better especially when there is no widespread confidence that 'the secular project' can adequately resource any society in areas such as personal and family life, ethics and politics, health and environment, civic and international responsibilities. Karen Armstrong was right when she remarked that, "in the middle of the 20th century it was generally taken for granted that secularism was the coming ideology and that never again would religion play a major role in public life. Well, we certainly got that wrong."[2] This does not mean that we have a purely religious world to deal with; rather *it is simultaneously both religious and secular in complex ways*. There are important issues between the religions; but there are also further, overlapping issues between each of the religions and the various secular understandings and forces.

Here it would be wise to take account of the ways such relationships have been handled in the recent past, by referring to the three major "settlements" made in this regard, namely, the British, the French and the American. Referring to these "settlements" I would allow Dr. David Ford of Cambridge Divinity School to make the point. "In one of the sessions of the *Clinton Global Initiative* in the section on 'Religious and Ethnic Conflict' [there was] a panel with an Englishman, a Frenchman and an American. As they spoke about religion and politics the Frenchman resisted any suggestion that religions should be taken seriously as religions within the political sphere: problems were traced mainly to economic causes, and he was confident that if poverty were dealt with effectively the unrest in French cities would disappear. The American (who was also a Muslim) insisted that the religions needed to contribute to public discourse but that the American separation of Church and state was a healthy thing. The Englishman, John Battle MP (the Prime Minister Tony Blair's special adviser on the religions), told stories of his own involvement with religious communities in his Leeds constituency, and evoked a complex settlement in which religious bodies were seen as stakeholders in society with whom the government and other public bodies were in constant communication and negotiation and whose identities could be affirmed by such means as state-supported faith schools. It was as if each was representing his own nation's

settlement, developed over centuries. Making judgments on such complex achievements, each worked out in special circumstances, is dangerous, but I will risk it in summary form."[3]

I think that in the current world situation the French secularist solution is the least satisfactory[4] for its practical exclusion of religions from the public sphere (including state schools and universities) is in effect the establishment of a state ideology that is not neutral in relation to religion but is suspicious, critical and often hostile. It envisages a secular public sphere. It is not well suited to a world that is religious and secular at the same time.

The American separation of church and state is far more benign with regard to the religions, and in fact religion plays a major role in American politics. But there has been a tendency to try to use the separation to create a neutral public space, where it is illegitimate to draw explicitly on religious sources. This 'lowest common denominator' public square[5] is increasingly being criticized, even by secular thinkers such as Jeffrey Stout[6] of Princeton University, who see it as an impoverishment of public life. Both religious and secular traditions should be able to contribute in their distinctive ways to public debate rather than reducing all discourse to a secularized lowest common denominator.

That at its best is what happens in Britain also. Its particular history has kept religion involved in its public life, sometimes controversially usually resisting pressures from those quarters who have more sympathy with secularist, often atheist, ideologies and would favour a French-style settlement. Britain also comes out rather poorly from comparative studies of the relative alienation of the religious and ethnic minorities from the rest of society. In global terms, Britain has the conditions for pioneering work in shaping a religious and secular society that draws on the resources within each of the traditions for peaceful living and working together. They have an extraordinary range of religious communities in a society that has also experienced intense secularization. The British settlement *works within what one might call a minimal secular and religious framework that enables mutual public space*. This has been shaped over many centuries and is constantly open to renegotiation. The framework is minimal in that it refuses to impose either a particular religious solution or a particular secular solution and so lives by ongoing negotiation rather than by appeal to a fixed constitution or principles. It therefore helps to create a mutual public

space with possibilities for shared discussion, dialogue, education, deliberation, and collaboration– in contrast to the French tendency towards strictly secular public space and the American tendency towards neutral public space. But for all practical purposes this constant, ongoing negotiation leaves the British settlement little better than the others, oscillating between secular pluralism and religious exclusivism.

The point that I am driving at by alluding to the just mentioned "settlements" is that there is no widespread confidence that 'the secular project' can adequately resource any society in areas such as personal and family life, ethics and politics, health and environment, civic and international responsibilities. So where is wisdom to be found that we need in the South Asian context for the shaping of our society in the twenty-first century? South Asian situation is rather different. Speaking of Pakistan we can see that it draws on the Islamic tradition as its reservoir of wisdom and religious bodies are seen as the major stakeholders in its society but the "settlement" it has reached or is trying to reach is in no way free of the struggle between secular pluralism and religious exclusivism. A flippant remark is often heard in this regard but it has, perhaps, a ring of truth when it is said that Pakistan already has more of religion than it can handle! If the French, the Americans and the British, respectively, have a secular, neutral and mutual public space, Pakistan seems to have moved toward a public space that is invaded by religion. Not only that, it is constantly being renegotiated with all sorts of hostilities. There was a time, not long ago, when the "ultras" were few, forming only a tiny wart on the face of the worldwide attempt to revivify Islam. Sadly, we can no longer enjoy the luxury of ignoring them. The extreme has broadened, and the middle ground, giving way, is everywhere dislocated and confused. And this enfeeblement of the middle ground, of the moderation enjoined by the Prophetic example, is in turn accelerated by the opprobrium which the extremists bring not simply upon themselves, but upon committed Muslims everywhere. Islamic spirituality, which exercised the most pervasive influence over the social, cultural and intellectual life of the Islamic community throughout the centuries and had traditionally been a stronghold against worldliness and literalism, has also seen the corrosive effect of extremism. We shall return to the question later but before that let me state the upshot of the issue. And the upshot is this.

It is the theological position that you take on the question of the religious and cultural other that determines everything else that follows,

attitudes, behaviour, dealings, agendas, relationships etc. Moreover, it is not only an inter-faith issue; it has far reaching implications for intra-faith dialogue and relations and would in the end back fire on one's own community as we have seen in Pakistan in the case of Islam and, if I go by the data shared by my Christian and Hindu friends, also undermined the internal coherence of the Pakistani Christian community and the Hindu sensibility. A person who does not maintain a deep seated respect for that "divinely ordained diversity" and has no place or tolerance for the religious and cultural Other in his or her perspective would, naturally, be expected to react in a similar manner when it comes to the dissident voices, difference of interpretation or diversity of opinions in one's own community.

The challenge is big; how to tread a third way between secular pluralism and religious exclusivism and how to articulate an appropriate theological/conceptual approach to the Other; to do so without undermining the integrity of our own religious self-definition; and to do so in a manner that strengthens and complements all existing attempts to establish openness, tolerance, mutual respect and fruitful dialogue between believers in a world of religious plurality.

According to my lights, it is the perspective nurtured by Islamic spirituality that enables us to uphold the normativity of Islam without detriment to our universalism; and it is only true universalism that can generate "a transcendently ordained tolerance" which carries with it some divinely revealed sanction. A tolerance that is not the outcome of a sentimental desire for peaceful relations between the members of different religions, or perspectives within one given religion, but one which is deeply rooted in a recognition of, and respect for, the holiness that lies at the core of all faith and wisdom traditions, all revealed religions. According to our lights, a universalism that does not include particularism is itself particularist and exclusivist— it excludes exclusivism. A Universalist perspective based on Sufi hermeneutics provides a third way between secular pluralism and religious exclusivism.

It is, however, sadly the case, and it applies to most of our dialogue forums, that so many of those engaged in dialogue on behalf of Muslims, Hindus and Christians are not seen as representatives of mainstream Hindu, Muslim and Christian opinion. Those who are in dialogue are, in a sense, those who do not need to be, as they already possess a respectful attitude to the religious other; and those who stay away from dialogue,

out of suspicion or ignorance, are those who most need to open up to, and respect, the other. The main drawback of the many well-intentioned efforts to present a Qur'anic 'approach' to, or 'perspective' on, religious dialogue is that they fail to connect sufficiently with those who most need to be convinced of the argument, those for whom the normativity of Islam, Hinduism or Christianity is threatened or undermined by the kind of pluralism or universalism propounded.

Each of the three Abrahamic traditions and the non-Semitic civilizations have their own, distinct yet related, ways of giving priority to God, honouring God, blessing or hallowing the name of God, respecting the mystery of God's active, holy presence among us. These texts are most liberating when they are read for the sake of God and God's purposes, even though we differ on just how God is to be identified.

This is immensely important for public life. Each of these wisdom traditions or faiths identifies idolatry as the most radical distortion and corruption of human life. To give ultimate status, honour and priority to whatever is not God— whether a race, a nation, a leader, an ideal, a gender, an ideology, a science, an economic system or even the whole of creation— harnesses immense religious energies often to devastating effect. The most insidious forms of idolatry are explicitly religious, distorted ways of identifying God or trying to harness God to one's own cause. The only reliable way of countering such idolatries is continually to seek the God beyond our constructions, to be open to correction, challenge and critique, and to sustain those practices of prayer, common life, study and debate that allow the truth to be recognized. What could be healthier for each of these wisdom traditions than to contribute to this by the shared study of scriptures? What could be healthier for our public life than for citizens within these faiths to be able to share their wisdom and together to work out ways of faithful, non-idolatrous service of the common good?

Iqbal, the sage and poet-philosopher, sang in his magnum opus, the *Javid Nama* (Pilgrimage of Eternity): [7]

کافر و مومن بمه خلق خداست   حرف بد برلب آوردن خطا است
باخبر شو از مقام آدمی   آدمیت احترام آدمی
می شود بر کافر و مومن شفیق   بندهٔ عشق از خدا گیرد طریق

Soiling one's tongue with ill-speech is a sin
The disbeliever and the believer are alike creatures of God.

Humanity, human respect for human reality:
Be conscious of the station of humanity.

...

The slave of love who takes his path from God
Becomes a loving friend of both disbeliever and believer.[8]

What prevents us from becoming *a loving friend of both disbeliever and believer* has its roots in the presiding paradigm or worldview that our age has come to espouse and that warrants a quick overview of the march of our intellectual history with reference to the question of the Religious Other. The attitude manifested itself in a different mode after the advent of Modernity when the Western cultural imagination turned away after its encounter with the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. This inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities and was responsible for the withdrawal of the Western thinkers of Enlightenment from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge.[9] It was specifically a Modern phenomenon as, during the Middle Ages, despite the outwards conflicts and even protracted wars, intellectual exchange had continued at a deeper and more meaningful level.

Since the 18th century, many of the secularists, rationalistic, and especially agnostic and atheistic philosophers of Europe have taken recourse to the argument that if religion were to be true, why are there then Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other religions with different messages? According to them, the multiplicity of religions is therefore proof that all religions must be false. "The multiplicity of sacred forms has been used as an excuse to reject all sacred forms." This line of reasoning is accepted by Karl Marx, and is one of his arguments for the rejection of religion. The fallacy of this argument lies in that these people identified the expression of the Sacred within a particular religious universe with the Absolute itself, and since there have been other expressions of the Absolute in other religious universes, they were led to the denial of the Absolute itself, and to the claim that everything is relative and, therefore, there is no Sacred as such. The truth of the matter, on the contrary, is that the very multiplicity of sacred forms in different religions, far from negating the sacredness of things, only confirms the richness of the Source of all that is sacred, the infinite creativity of the Divine Origin of all sacred forms.

things, only confirms the richness of the Source of all that is sacred, the infinite creativity of the Divine Origin of all sacred forms.

In this context the remarks of the twentieth century metaphysician Frithjof Schuon immediately come to mind. Faced with the fact that there are diverse religions which apparently exclude each other most of the people tend to think that one religion is right and that all the others are false; others conclude that all are false. "It is as if," Schuon remarked, "faced with the discovery of other solar systems, some maintained that there is only one sun, ours, while others, seeing that our sun is not unique, denied that it is a sun, and concluded that there is no sun...."[10] The Asian sensibility goes for a third possibility– that all religions are right, not in their dogmatic exclusivism, but their unanimous inner meaning, which coincides with pure metaphysics, signifying "the totality of the primordial and universal truths– and therefore of the metaphysical axioms– whose formulation does not belong to any particular system." Likewise one could speak of the *religio perennis,* "designating by this term the essence of every religion, that is, the essence of every form of worship, every form of prayer and every system of morality just as the *Sophia perennis* is the essence of all dogmas and all expressions of wisdom." With regard to *religio perennis,* the Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn 'Arabi writes:

> *All the revealed religions [sharā'i'] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [bāṭil] by abrogation– that is the opinion of the ignorant.*[11]

This whole doctrine can be clearly illustrated further by reflecting on by the following example: the sun is unique in our solar system, but it is not so in space; we can see other suns, since they are situated in space like ours, but we do not see them as suns. The uniqueness of our sun is belied by the multiplicity of the fixed stars, without thereby ceasing to be valid within the system which is ours under Providence; the niceties is then manifested in the part, not in the totality, although this part is an image of the totality and represents it for us; it then 'is', by the divine

this case, the part 'is' totality so far as its spiritual efficacy is concerned.[12]

However, while propounding a belief in a universal Truth, we do not want to commit the error of drawing the conclusion that one can ignore or strip away the outward differences in the religions, so as to focus solely on their inner similarities. We reject this notion and instead demonstrate that the outward distinctness in the forms is necessary and providential. "[T]he divergence between religions is due not only to the incomprehension of men, it is also in the Revelations, thus in the Divine Will, and that is why there is a difference between exoterism and esoterism; the diverse dogmas contradict each other, not only in the minds of theologians, but also— and *a priori*— in the Sacred Scriptures; yet God, in giving these Scriptures, gives at the same time the keys for understanding their underlying unity. If all men were metaphysicians and contemplatives, a single Revelation might suffice; but since that is not the way things are, the Absolute must reveal Itself in different ways, and the metaphysical viewpoints from which these Revelations derive— according to different causal explanations and different spiritual temperaments— cannot but contradict one another on the plane of forms, somewhat like geometrical figures contradict each other so long as one has not grasped their spatial and symbolic homogeneity."[13]

Every religion is a manifestation of the One Supreme Reality. Most of us have, however, heard it said more than once over the years: "How is it possible to believe in religion since the different religions contradict each other?" The motive behind such remarks can never be profound, but it may vary between a would-be self-justification for not practicing religion and the desire to be thought intelligent or up to date.[14] Every religion is completely dependent upon the Divine Word, which may manifest Itself either as Book or Man. In Christianity the Word is Christ, and the New Testament is not Revelation but an inspired sacred history of the life and teaching of the Word made Flesh, whereas Judaism and Islam are based on the Word made Book. The basis of Judaism is the Pentateuch the first five books of the Old Testament which were revealed to Moses, together with the Psalms which were revealed to David, and the basis of Islam is the Qur'an which was revealed to Muhammad. In the ancient religions, of which Hinduism appears to be the sole fully surviving example, there was room for both these Divine Manifestations: the Vedas are the Word made Book, and the Avatāras of Vishnu are the Word made Flesh. It must however be clearly understood

that in the religions which are based on the Word made Book, the Messenger to whom the Book is revealed is thereby to be ranked at the highest degree of sanctity, which means that some of his utterances are bound to proceed from the level of the Divine Word, even if the structure of the religion does not allow him to be worshipped. It is therefore possible for every Divine Messenger to make a statement which amounts to the same as the words of Christ, "None cometh to the Father but through me"; and there is in Islam a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad to the effect that there can be no meeting with God which is not pre-ceded by a meeting with himself.[15] We are thus enabled to speak symbolically of the Word as a precious stone of many facets. This brings us back to the claims to absoluteness and universality that seem to be the foundation of the extended analogy of the "suns and stars" that we had alluded to earlier and this allows us to make the following observation.

One of the recent publications[16] on the issue of the religious other displays a sub-title; *Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age* which is evocative as it underscores the importance of another basic insight that informs the perspective we are considering here. We are conscious of the fact that a religion's claim to unique efficacy must be allowed the status of half-truth because there is, in fact, in the vast majority of cases, no alternative choice. "In the past it would have been as pointless for a religion to dwell on the validity and efficacy of other religions as it would be for an announcement to be made from an all-capacious lifeboat to those struggling in the waters about it that five miles away there was an equally good lifeboat."[17] According to their lights, in the "Post-Prophetic Age" the conditions are different. "For those who come face to face with the founder of a new religion, the lack of alternative choice becomes as it were absolute in virtue of the correspondingly absolute greatness of the Divine Messenger himself. It is moreover at its outset, that is, during its brief moment of 'absoluteness', that the claims of a religion are for the most part formulated. But with the passage of time there is inevitably a certain levelling out between the new and the less new, the more so in that the less new may have special claims on certain people." This is not the place to address the implications– conceptual, theological, as well as practical and legal– of this "levelling out" but we felt that the point needed registration here for its importance.

If we look at the two major houses of faith that share the mutual public space in Pakistan, that is, Islam and Christianity, and try to find

the fault line that hampers the path of Peaceful Coexistence with reference to the two communities it could be described, in theological terms, as follows. In the case of Islam it is *Misplaced Absolutes*[18] and *Supersessionism* and in the case of Christianity it is a monopolizing claim on the Divine Mercy through the notion of the One and Only, Unique Saviour. Both lead to religious exclusivism. Islamic *Supersessionism*, taking its point of departure in an apparently "benign Inclusivism" ends up in exclusivism by interpreting the inclusivist verses of the Qur'an in an exclusivist manner. The monopolizing claim of Christianity arrives at the same end as it classes Hinduism/Buddhism as "paganism", Judaism as a superseded religion and Islam as a pseudo religion.

For thousands of years already, humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches, which constitute so many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands differentiated refractions of the one Truth. The exclusivist claim thus seems contrary to the nature of things. The following observation, again from Frithjof Schuon, remarkably sums up the point: [19]

> ...the ethnic diversity of humanity and the geographical extent of the earth suffice to make highly unlikely the axiom of one unique religion for all men, and on the contrary highly likely-- to say the least-- the need for a plurality of religions; in other words, the idea of a single religion does not escape contradiction if one takes account of its claims to absoluteness and universality on the one hand, and the psychological and physical impossibility of their realisation on the other.

If God had sent only one religion to a world of widely differing affinities and aptitudes, it would not have been a fair test for all. He has therefore sent different religions, especially suited to the needs and characteristics of the different sectors of humanity. In this regard the same author has observed:

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

instantaneous reduction of the universe to ashes. [20]

This is a problem of a particularly specific nature in the west, especially in America where there is a large presence of Christians[21] that hold that there in only one true faith and only they have it but, *mutatis mutandis,* the same thing is true of other faith traditions, especially of those parts of their exoteric aspect that has been moulded and influence by modernity. That makes it difficult as we work for harmony among the world's faiths. I would like to work my point by focusing on the Islamic perspective here.

In the Islamic perspective, the "divinely ordained diversity" lies in the following verse, which many consider among the last Revelations received by the Prophet and belongs to the period which marks the close of his mission. As such it coincides with a cyclic moment of extreme significance– the last 'opportunity'[22] for a direct message to be sent from Heaven to earth during what remains of this cycle of time. Many of the last Qur'anic revelations are concerned with completing and perfecting the new religion. But this verse is a final and lasting message for mankind as a whole. The Qur'an expressly addresses the adherents of all the different orthodoxies on earth; and no message could be more relevant to the age in which we live and, in particular, to the mental predicament of man in these later days.

For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. And if God[23] had willed He would have made you one people. But (He hath willed it otherwise) that He may put you to the test in what He has given you.[24] So vie with one another in good works. Unto God will ye be brought back, and He will inform you about that wherein ye differed.[25]

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

Verily We have sent messengers before thee[26] About some of them have We told thee, and about some have We not told thee.[27]

We may quote also:

Verily the Faithful[28] and the Jews and the Sabians[29] and the Christians whoso believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth deeds of piety– no

fear shall come upon them neither shall they grieve.[30]

There is a place for other religions within the Islamic civilization, and Muslims are obliged to protect the temples, synagogues and churches and other religious sanctuaries. It has to be admitted, however, that the authorities of Islam have been no less ready than their counterparts in other religions to fall a prey to religious exclusivism. Muslims have been encouraged to believe, and the majority have been only too eager to believe, that Islam has superseded all other religions and that it is therefore the sole valid religion on earth. But however absolute the claims of Muslim theologians and jurisprudents may be, they are shown in fact to be relative by the tolerance which Islam makes obligatory towards the religious Other.

The intrinsic nature of the Muslim polity is derived from the Prophet's embodiment of the Qur'anic revelation. His acts of statesmanship should not be seen in isolation as a series of historical events, but as a series of symbolic acts which, more powerfully than words, uphold the inviolability of the religious rights of the Other and the necessity of exercising a generous tolerance in regard to the Other. The seminal and most graphic expression of this sacred vision inspiring the kind of tolerance witnessed throughout Muslim history is given to us in the following well-attested episode in the life of the Prophet. In the ninth year after the Hijra (631), a prominent Christian delegation from Najrān, an important centre of Christianity in the Yemen, came to engage the Prophet in theological debate in Medina. The main point of contention was the nature of Christ: was he one of the messengers of God or the unique Son of God? What is important for our purposes is not the disagreements voiced, nor the means by which the debate was resolved, but the fact that when these Christians requested to leave the city to perform their liturgy, the Prophet invited them to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. The Christians in question performed the Byzantine Christian rites.[31] This means that they were enacting some form of the rites which incorporated the fully-developed Trinitarian theology of the Orthodox councils, emphasising the definitive creed of the divine "sonship" of Christ– doctrines explicitly criticised in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, the Prophet allowed the Christians to accomplish their rites in his own mosque. Disagreement on the plane of dogma is one thing, tolerance– indeed encouragement– of the enactment of that dogma is another.

One should also mention in this context the tolerance that is inscribed

into the first Muslim constitution, that of Medina. In this historic document a pluralistic polity is configured. The right to freedom of worship was assumed, given the unprejudiced recognition of all three religious groups who were party to the agreement: Muslims, Jews and polytheists– the latter indeed comprising the majority at the time the constitution was drawn up. Each group enjoyed unfettered religious and legal autonomy, and the Jews, it should be noted, were not required at this stage to pay any kind of poll-tax. The Muslims were indeed recognised as forming a distinct group within the polity, but this did not compromise the principle of mutual defence which was at the root of the agreement: Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.'[32]

Let us also take an example from the Indian subcontinent where Islam met the Hindu and Buddhist wisdom traditions– the oldest among the revealed religions according to our lights– for the first time. Throughout Islamic history, Hindus and Buddhists– together with Zoroastrians, not to mention other religious groups–were regarded by Muslims not as pagans, polytheists, or atheists, but as followers of an authentic religion, and thus to be granted official *dhimmī* status, that is, they were to be granted official protection by the state authorities: any violation of their religious, social or legal rights was subject to the 'censure' (*dhimma*) of the Muslim authorities, who were charged with the protection of these rights.

It is instructive to glance at the roots of this Muslim appraisal of the religio-juridical status of Hinduism and Buddhism. One of the earliest and most decisive encounters between Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism on the Indian soil took place during the short but successful campaign of the young Umayyad general, Muhammad b. Qāsim in Sind, launched in 711. During the conquest of this predominantly Buddhist province, he received petitions from the indigenous Buddhists and Hindus in the important city of Brahmanabad regarding the restoration of their temples and the upholding of their religious rights generally. He consulted his superior, the governor of Kufa, Hajjāj b. Yūsuf, who in turn consulted his religious scholars. The result of these deliberations was the formulation of an official position which was to set a decisive precedent of religious tolerance for the ensuing centuries of Muslim rule in India. Hajjāj wrote to Muhammad b. Qāsim a letter which was translated into what became known as the 'Brahmanabad settlement': [33]

The request of the chiefs of Brahmanabad about the building of Budh and other temples, and toleration in religious matters, is just and reasonable. I do not see what further rights we can have over them beyond the usual tax. They have paid homage to us and have undertaken to pay the fixed tribute [jizya] to the Caliph. Because they have become dhimmīs we have no right whatsoever to interfere in their lives and property. Do permit them to follow their own religion. No one should prevent them.

The Arab historian, Al-Balādhurī, quotes Muhammad b. Qāsim's famous statement made at Alor,[34] a city besieged for a week, and then taken without force, according to strict terms: there was to be no bloodshed, and the local faith would not be opposed. Muhammad b. Qāsim was reported to have said:[35]

The temples [lit. al-Budd, but referring to the temples of the Buddhists and the Hindus, as well as the Jains] shall be treated by us as if they were the churches of the Christians, the synagogues of the Jews, and the fire temples of the Magians.[36]

Although subsequent Muslim rulers varied in their degree of fidelity to this precedent establishing the principle of religious tolerance in India,[37] the point being made here is more theological than political. What is to be stressed is that Hindus and Buddhists were, in principle, to be granted the same religious and legal recognition as fellow monotheists, the Jews and the Christians, or the 'People of the Book'. The implication of this act of recognition is clear: the religion these Hindus and Buddhists followed was not analogous to the pagan polytheistic religions, whose adherents were not granted such privileges. Rather, as a community akin to the 'People of the Book', they were regarded, implicitly if not explicitly, as recipients of an authentic divine revelation.

It may be argued, however, that granting Hindus and Buddhists legal recognition was in fact more political than theological; that the instinctive response of Hajjāj and his general stemmed more from hard-headed pragmatism than subtle theological reflection. While such pragmatism no doubt played a role in this historic decision, the point to be made is this: that the scholars of Islam did not (and still do not) regard this 'pragmatic' policy as violating or compromising any fundamental theological principle of Islam. Pragmatism and principle went hand in hand. The implication of granting Hindus and Buddhists legal recognition, political protection and religious tolerance is that the

spiritual path and moral code of the Hindu and Buddhist faith derive from an authentic revelation of God. If this be disputed by Muslims, then the historical practice of granting Hindus and Buddhists *dhimmī* status will be seen to be nothing more than 'Realpolitik', at best, or a betrayal of certain theological principles, at worst: one would be guilty of according religious legitimacy to a false religion. We would argue, on the contrary, that the Hindus and Buddhists were recognized– in an as it were existential, intuitive, largely unarticulated manner– by Muslims as followers of an authentic faith, even if this faith appeared to contradict Islam in certain major respects; that the early Muslims in their encounters with Hinduism and Buddhism observed sufficient 'family resemblances' between Hinduism and Buddhism and the 'People of the Book' for them to feel justified in extending to Hindus and Buddhists the same legal and religious rights granted to the 'People of the Book'; that the 'pragmatic' decision of the politicians and generals was actually in harmony with the Islamic revelation, despite the reservations, refutations or denunciations stemming from popular Muslim prejudice, and despite the paucity of scholarly works by Muslims making doctrinally explicit what was implied in the granting of *dhimmī* status to Hindus and Buddhists.

It would be useful to explore further the implications of this early Muslim response to Hinduism and Buddhism, and to provide a more explicit theological– or spiritual– justification for this response, which formed the basis of the official policy of tolerance of Hinduism and Buddhism by Muslims world-wide. But that is a subject of a separate study that we cannot compress here. The conclusion is, however, self-evident. If Hindus and Buddhists are recognized as akin to the 'People of the Book', then they are implicitly to be included in the spectrum of 'saved' communities, as expressed in the following verse, one of the most universal verses of the Qur'ān: *Truly those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Christians and the Sabeans– whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs virtuous acts– for such, their reward is with their Lord, no fear or suffering will befall them* (2:62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69).

To sum, the record of tolerance in Muslim history must surely be seen as the fruit of the prophetic paradigm, which in turn derives from and is a commentary upon, the vision revealed by the Qur'an, to which we should now turn. Notwithstanding the many verses critical of earlier religious traditions, the fundamental message of the Qur'an as regards all

previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse, as mentioned earlier, in this regard is:

We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. And if God had willed He would have made you one people. But (He hath willed it otherwise) that He may put you to the test in what He has given you. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God will ye be brought back, and He will inform you about that wherein ye differed (5:48).

This verse, supplemented by a multitude of other proof texts (given in the endnotes), establishes four crucial principles that enshrine the Qur'anic Vision which both fashion and substantiate an open-minded approach to all religions and their adherents and inculcates the attitude that if God is the ultimate source of the different rites of the religions, no one set of rites can be legitimately excluded from the purview of authentic religion:

- the Qur'an confirms and protects all divine revelations;[38]

- the very plurality of these revelations is the result of a divine will for diversity on the plane   of human communities;[39]

- this diversity of revelations and plurality of communities is intended to stimulate a healthy 'competition' or mutual enrichment in the domain of 'good works';[40]

- difference of opinion are inevitable consequences of the very plurality of meanings embodied in diverse revelations; these differences are to be tolerated on the human plane, and will be finally resolved in the Hereafter.[41]

Dr. Martin Lings has elucidated the issue with great perspicacity and insightfulness in his masterly study "With all Thy Mind",[42] but I would refer here to Arvind Sharma who has closely followed the four crucial principles mentioned above in his "Can Muslims Talk to Hindus?"[43] After working his thesis through the enunciated categories, Sharma concluded as follows:

I would now like to discuss a third option provided by Verse 13 of Sūrah 49, (..."*Oh mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and we have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you in the sight of Allah, is the best*

conduct Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.[44]

This verse seems to offer the clearest mandate for the Muslim to talk to the Hindu. A Medina verse, is addressed specifically to humanity, not just Muslims and in this verse the diversity not just of peoples but of sexes is clearly alluded to. Note that no revelations have been sent in terms of the division of humanity by sex, but rather to the peoples. Not only is diversity of the peoples alluded to, there are no qualifications attached to it, such as that they be Jews or Christians or Sabaens. Moreover, the purpose of this diversity is also identified. It is to provide an occasion for the people to know each other– or to put in the modern idiom– engage in dialogue, so that it might bring out the best in them. Hence Muslims and Hindus can talk to each other not (only) because revelation is universal but because diversity is universal–a pervasive feature of the human condition. In other words, the diversity being celebrated here is "radical," in its etymological sense of pertaining to the roots, and as providing a root metaphor of the human condition. I would therefore propose that it is possible for the Muslims to talk to the Hindus, without this possibility having to be mediated through the category of ahl al-kitāb; which is to say that Muslims can talk directly to the Hindus just because they constitute two different communities and that this difference is meant to enable them to come to know each other. The Qur'an provides what we might call an anthropological basis here, as distinguished from a revelatory basis, for the Muslims to talk to the Hindus.[45]

The conclusion is that for the survival of humanity it is necessary for man to respect his fellow-men; in the same way it is necessary for him to learn to respect religions other than his own. It is only through the adoption of this moral and spiritual approach that, borrowing Iqbal's phrase, *"man may rise to a fresh vision of his future."* And this brings us to the opening point of our discourse, *"Be conscious of the station of humanity"* which is intimately related to the question of the "Other"– religious, cultural, political– which, in turn, subsumes the issue of "tolerance" that we wish to address now not only in the context of "a South Asian sensibility" but with reference to Western-dominated global reality since the problems of social integration that we face today are not confined to our local situations any more but impact all persons who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the local and global reality. This calls for a few remarks about the situation of the modern world, the "global reality" that engulfs us, shapes our

worlds and determines our predicament.

In this late stage of secular modernity and its hangover in postmodernism, melancholy has become a collective mood. Melancholy used to afflict individuals who felt rejected and exiled from the significance of the cosmos. By our day it has turned into a cultural malady deriving from a world that has been drained of all meaning and which had come to cast doubt on all traditional sources– theological, metaphysical, and historical. The dominant mood of our time is "a desperate search for a pattern." The search is desperate because it seemed futile to look for a pattern in reality. In terms of its mindset or worldview the modern world is living in what has been called the *Age of Anxiety*, and if one tries to look beyond symptoms to find the prime cause one comes to realize that there is something wrong with the presiding paradigm or worldview that our age had come to espouse. Something has gone wrong with the world and the Time is again out of joint? East and West both seem to face a predicament! As Iqbal has observed:

<div dir="rtl">

من از بلال و چلپیا دگر نیندیشم
کہ فتنۂ دگری در ضمیر ایّام است

</div>

I am no longer concerned about the crescent and the cross,
For the womb of time carries an ordeal of a different kind. [46]

The crisis that the world found itself in as it swung on the hinge of the 20th century was located in something deeper than particular ways of organizing political systems and economies. In different ways, the East and the West were going through a single common crisis whose cause was the spiritual condition of the modern world.[47] That condition was characterized by loss– the loss of religious certainties and of transcendence with its larger horizons. The nature of that loss is strange but ultimately quite logical. When, with the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, meaning began to ebb and the stature of humanity to diminish. The world lost its human dimension, and we began to lose control of it. In the words of F. Schuon: [48]

> *The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error*
> *of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having*
> *either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant*
> *contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a*
> *worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is*

human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming
man means binding him again to Heaven, re-establishing the broken
link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from
the cult of matter, quantity and cunning, and reintegrating him into the
world of the spirit and serenity, we would even say: into the world of
sufficient reason.

If anything characterizes the modern era, it is a loss of faith in
transcendence, in God as an objective reality. It is the age of eclipse of
transcendence. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times
had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that
characterized Modernity. The eclipse of transcendence impacts our way
of looking at the world, in the formation of a world view, in a far-
reaching manner. According to our perspective, Transcendence means
that there is another reality that is more real, more powerful, and better
than this mundane order. The eclipse of transcendence impacted our way
of looking at the world, that is, forming a worldview? It is an issue of the
greatest magnitude. Whatever transpires in other domains of life–
politics, living standards, environmental conditions, interpersonal
relationships, the arts– is ultimately dependent on our presiding world
view. Modern Westerners, forsaking clear thinking, allowed themselves
to become so obsessed with life's material underpinnings that they had
written science a blank cheque; a blank cheque for science's claims
concerning what constituted Reality, knowledge and justified belief. This
is the cause of our spiritual crisis. It joined other crises as we entered the
new century– the environmental crisis, the population explosion, the
widening gulf between the rich and the poor, and the list goes on. But
that is the subject for another day.[49] Suffice to say here that the
enlightenment project and modernity's worldview had brought in the
human thought, the damage that it had done to the academia, and the
contemporary discourse created by it is marked by incredulity. The
incredulity takes many forms and the discourse grew increasingly shrill.
Minimally, it contented itself with pointing out that "we have no maps
and don't know how to make them." Hardliners added, "and never again
we will have a consensual worldview." In short, our contemporary
discourse is filled with voices critiquing the truncated worldview of the
Enlightenment, but from that reasonable beginning it plunges on to argue
unreasonably that world-views (or grand narratives) are misguided in
principle. Wouldn't we be better off if we extricate ourselves from the
worldview we had unwittingly slipped into and replace it with a more
generous and accurate one that shows us deeply connected to the final

nature of things?[50] A world ends when its metaphor dies, and modernity's metaphor– endless progress through science-powered technology– is dead. It is only cultural lag– the backward pull of the outgrown good– that keeps us running on it.

In this regard it is useful to investigate how the West engaged with the idea and practice of tolerance as it had manifested in other religions and cultures and how does it relate to the historical trajectory through which it became established in the West.

Tolerance– Religious and Secular

Tolerance is a multi-faceted concept comprising moral, psychological, social, legal, political and religious dimensions. The dimension of tolerance addressed by this essay is specifically religious tolerance, such as this principle finds expression within the Islamic tradition, and how it came to be enshrined in the Western thought after the Enlightenment. Further to that we would try to look at the shared legacy of the idea that suffered a diverse destiny in the West. Religious tolerance can be defined in terms of a positive spiritual predisposition towards the religious Other, a predisposition fashioned by a vision of the divinely-willed diversity of religious communities. If the diversity of religions is seen to be an expression of the will of God,[51] then the inevitable differences between the religions will be not only tolerated but also celebrated: tolerated on the outward, legal and formal plane, celebrated on the inward, cultural and spiritual plane. As is the case with secular tolerance, here also one will encounter a positive and open-minded attitude, one capable of stimulating policies and laws of a tolerant nature towards the religious Other, but the root of this attitude derives from a principle going beyond the secular domain: the tolerant attitude emerges as the consequence of a kaleidoscopic vision of unfolding divine revelations, a vision which elicits profound respect for the religions of the Other, rather than reluctantly, begrudgingly or condescendingly granting mere toleration. And this brings us back to the "anthropological basis" of Dr. Arvind Sharma referred earlier. The rest of our paper closely follows the argument presented by him in response to the apparently intelligible demand voiced by the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn that the Muslims– and that holds, *mutatis mutandis,* for other faiths encountering modernity– must pass through an Enlightenment. He wrote that "Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam."[52]

Tolerance born of a divinely ordained imperative cannot but engender respect for the religious Other. But the converse does not hold: one can be tolerant in a secular sense outwardly and legally, without this being accompanied by sincere respect for the religion of the Other. Moreover, the purely secular approach to tolerance carries with it the risk of falling into a corrosive relativism of the 'anything goes' variety. It can lead to the normativity and particularity of one's own faith being diluted, if not sacrificed, for the sake of an abstracted and artificial social construct.[53]

The Islamic tradition, in principle as well as in practice, provides compelling answers to many questions pertaining to the relationship between religious tolerance and the practice of one's own faith. The lessons drawn from the Islamic tradition reveal that tolerance of the Other is in fact integral to the practice of Islam– it is not some optional extra, some cultural luxury, and still less, something one needs to import from some other tradition. This being said, one needs to take note of an irony: the essential sources of the Islamic faith reveal a sacred vision of diversity and difference, plurality and indeed of universality, which is unparalleled among world scriptures; the practice of contemporary Muslim states, however, not to mention many vociferous extra-state groups and actors, falls lamentably short of the current standards of tolerance set by the secular West. In consequence, it is hardly surprising that many argue that what the Muslim world needs in order to become more tolerant is to learn to become more modern and secular, and less traditional and 'visionary'. This kind of argument, however, ignoring and belittling the vast treasury of ethical and spiritual resources within the Islamic tradition, will succeed only in making Muslims more, rather than less, intolerant, by provoking defensive backlashes.

A more fruitful approach would be to encourage an honest acknowledgement by Muslims that, as regards the practice of religious tolerance, the secular West has indeed set high standards, albeit at the price of a corrosive relativism, a price which is becoming increasingly apparent to many with the passage of time. Instead of being seen as contrary to the Islamic vision, however, such tolerant codes of conduct can be seen as formal expressions of the universal principle of tolerance inhering in the vision of Islam itself. In this sacred vision the plurality of paths to the One is viewed as a reflection of the infinitude of the One; tolerance of diversity and difference on the human plane thus flows as a moral consequence of this divinely willed plurality, becoming thereby

not just a social ethic, but also an expression of the wisdom of the One, being ordained first 'from above', and then here below. Tolerance within the framework of a divinely ordained schema expresses both an obligation and a right: a moral obligation to permit people of different faiths to manifest their own specific ways of embodying and radiating these universal values, and the spiritual right to benefit from the specific manifestations of these universal values oneself. This accords with the very purpose of diversity as envisioned by the Qur'an that the "anthropological basis" of Dr. Arvind Sharma invoked:

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

Tolerant Islam or the Liberal West, Which came first?

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

Locke passionately proclaimed the need for 'universal tolerance', whatever one's religious beliefs, and, indeed, in the prevailing Christian climate, *despite* one's beliefs. Following on logically from this secular principle of tolerance was the right for non-Christians to live unmolested in the state of England, and be accorded full civil and political rights:

'...neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion'. This strict separation between religion and politics, church and state, so often viewed only as part of the evolutionary trajectory of western secularization must also be seen in the light of the historical interface between mutually intolerant Christian states and denominations, on the one hand, and a vibrantly tolerant Muslim polity, on the other. The current unquestioned right of freedom of religious belief and worship in the Western world is thus not simply a corollary of secular thought; it is a principle inspired, at least in part, by the influence of Islam.[54] 'Tolerance', according to (Reverend) Dr Susan Ritchie, 'was a matter of Ottoman policy and bureaucratic structure, and an expression of the Ottoman interpretation of Islam, which was in most instances stunningly liberal and cosmopolitan.'[55] It is thus hardly surprising that Norman Daniel should allow himself to make the simple– and, for many, startling– claim: 'The notion of toleration in Christendom was *borrowed* from Muslim practice' (emphasis added).[56] Ottoman tolerance of the Jews provides an illuminating contrast with the anti-Semitism of Christendom, which resulted in the regular pogroms and 'ethnic cleansing' by which the medieval Christian world was stained.[57]

At the very same time as the Christian West was indulging in periodic anti-Jewish pogroms, the Jews were experiencing what some Jewish historians themselves have termed a kind of 'golden age' under Muslim rule.[58] As has been abundantly attested by historical records, the Jews enjoyed not just freedom from oppression, but also an extraordinary revival of cultural, religious, theological and mystical creativity.[59] Same holds good for the Christians under Muslim rule in Spain.[60] Even so fierce a critic of contemporary Islam as Bernard Lewis cannot but confirm the facts of history as regards the true character of Muslim-Jewish relations until recent times. In his book, *The Jews of Islam*, he writes that even though there was a certain level of discrimination against Jews and Christians under Muslim rule, 'Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in re-conquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in pre-modern Europe.'[61] This pattern of tolerance characterised the nature of Muslim rule vis-à-vis Jews and Christians until modern times,

with very minor exceptions. As the Jewish scholar Mark Cohen notes: "The Talmud was burned in Paris, not in Cairo or Baghdad ... Staunch Muslim opposition to polytheism convinced Jewish thinkers like Maimonides of Islam's unimpeachable monotheism. This essentially 'tolerant' view of Islam echoed Islam's own respect for the Jewish 'people of the Book'."[62]

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

This type of analysis is not only simplistic and erroneous; it also obscures an irony at once historical and theological. The principle of religious tolerance has historically been one of the hallmarks of Muslim society, right up to its decline in the pre-modern period– a decline accelerated by the assault of western imperialism, mimetic industrialism, and corrosive consumerism, all of which diminished radically the spiritual 'sap' of the Islamic tradition, and thereby the ethics of tolerance and compassion. In contrast, the *intolerance* which characterised Christendom for much of its history only began to be 'deconstructed' in this same period, with the advent of western secularism. In other words, the rise of religious tolerance in the West appears to be correlated to the diminution of the influence of Christian values in public life in the modern period; conversely, in the Muslim world, it is the decline of the influence of Islamic values that has engendered that peculiar inferiority complex of which religious intolerance is a major symptom. Through the emasculation of this spiritual heritage, all sorts of imported ideological

counterfeits– from apologetic liberal Islam to militant radical Islamism– have been manufactured in an effort to fill the vacuum, most of them appearing as the desperate but impotent reflexes of a decaying religious form. In such a situation, what is required is a return to the spirit of the tradition, not another form of mimesis; it is therefore highly ironic that Muslims are being called upon to follow the path of secularisation in order to become more tolerant.

Rather, Muslims ought to be invited to become aware of the tolerance which truly characterises the spirit–and the history–of the Islamic tradition; to use this tradition as the yard-stick by which to critically gauge contemporary Muslim conduct and attitudes; to strive to revive and revalorise the principles of tolerance, diversity and pluralism which are enshrined at the very heart of this tradition; and to realise that tolerance is 'neither of the East nor of the West': no religion or culture can claim a monopoly on this universal human ethic. For Muslims, then, being tolerant of the religious Other does not require imitating any philosophical teachings on tolerance the Western thought has to offer, but rather returning to the moral and spiritual roots of their own tradition, while benefiting from and acknowledging the positive aspects of practical tolerance enacted by western nations in the realms of public law, human rights and political governance.[63]

Shared Legacy: Diverse Destinies

The last remarks bring us to consider the question that we evoked with reference to the remarks of Pim Fortuyn.[64] Mr. Fortuyn's views have generated many debates in the Islamic communities in the West and even reverberate in the Islamic world where the question has gained space in the prevalent discourse. There are arguments in defence and responses that challenge the argument but the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn remains with us. Do we have to pass through his laundromat to be made internally white, as it were, to have an authentic and honoured place of belonging at the table of the modern reality? Islam has a great history of universalism, that is to say, that Islam does not limit itself to the uplift of any given section of humanity, but rather announces a desire to transform the *entire* human family.[65] Among all the religions of the pre-Enlightenment world, only Buddhism rivalled Islam in massively encompassing a range of cultures. However Islam, unambiguously, was the foundation for a still wider range and variety of cultural worlds.[66] Has this triumphant demonstration of Islam's universalism come to an end? Perhaps the greatest single issue exercising the world today is the

engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles, cannot manage? The current agreement between zealots on both sides – Islamic and unbelieving– that Islam and Western modernity can have no conversation, and cannot inhabit each other, seems difficult given traditional Islamic assurances about the universal potential of revelation. The increasing numbers of individuals who identify themselves as entirely Western, and entirely Muslim, demonstrate that the arguments against the continued ability of Islam to be inclusively universal are simply false.

Yet the question, the big new Eastern Question, will not go away quite easily. Palpably, there are millions of Muslims who are at ease somewhere within the spectrum of the diverse possibilities of Westernness. We need, however, a theory to match this practice. Is the accommodation real? What is the theological or *fiqh* status of this claim to an overlap? Can Islam really square this biggest of all historical circles, or must it now fail, and retreat into impoverished and hostile marginality, as history passes it by? Fortuyn, a highly-educated and liberal Islamophobe, was convinced that Islam cannot square the circle. He would say that the past genius of Islam in adapting itself to cultures from Senegal to Sumatra cannot be extended into our era, because the rules of that game no longer apply. Success today demands membership of a global reality, which means signing up to the terms of its philosophy.[67] How should Islam answer this charge? The answer is, of course, that 'Islam' can't. The religion's strength stems in large degree from its internal diversity. Different readings of the scriptures attract different species of humanity. There will be no unified Islamic voice answering Fortuyn's interrogation. The more useful question is: *who* should answer the charge? What sort of Muslim is best equipped to speak for us, and to defeat his logic?

Fortuyn's error was to impose a Christian squint on Islam. As a practising Catholic, he imported assumptions about the nature of religious authority that ignore the multi-centred reality of Islam. On doctrine, we try to be united - but he is not interested in our doctrine. On *fiqh*, we are substantially diverse. Even in the medieval period, one of the great moral and methodological triumphs of the Muslim mind was the confidence that a variety of *madhhabs* could conflict formally, but could all be acceptable to God.[68] Fortuyn and others who share his views work with the assumption that Islam is an ideology[69] and given the

nature of the Islam-West encounter the emergence of 'ideological Islam' was, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, entirely predictable. Everything at that time was ideology. Spirituality seemed to have ended, and postmodernism was not yet a twinkle in a Parisian eye. In fact, the British historian John Gray goes so far as to describe the process which Washington describes as the 'war on terror' as an internal Western argument which has nothing to do with traditional Islam. As he puts it: "The ideologues of political Islam are western voices, no less than Marx or Hayek. The struggle with radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel."[70] Nonetheless, the irony remains. We are represented by the unrepresentative, and the West sees in us a mirror image of its less attractive potentialities. Western Muslim theologians as well as many Muslim theologians living in the West– René Guénon, S. H. Nasr, Tim Winter, Tage Lindbom, Roger Garaudy to name just a few–frequently point out that the movements which seek to represent Islam globally, or in Western/Eastern minority situations, are typically movements which arose as reactions against Western political hegemony that themselves internalised substantial aspects of Western political method. In Europe, Muslim community leaders who are called upon to justify Islam in the face of recent terrorist activities are ironically often individuals who subscribe to ideologised forms of Islam which adopt dimensions of Western modernity in order to secure an anti-Western profile. It is no surprise that such leaders arouse the suspicion of the likes of Pim Fortuyn, or, indeed, a remarkably wide spectrum of commentators across the political spectrum.

Islam's universalism, however, is not well-represented by the advocates of *movement* Islam. Islamic universalism is represented by the great bulk of ordinary mosque-going Muslims who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the local and global reality. One could argue, against Fortuyn, that Muslim communities are far more open to the West than vice-versa, and know far more about it. There is no equivalent desire in the West to learn from and integrate into other cultures.[71] Islam, we will therefore insist, is more flexible than the West. Where they are intelligently applied, our laws and customs, mediated through the due instruments of *ijtihad*, have been reshaped substantially by encounter with the Western juggernaut, through faculties such as the concern for public interest, or *urf*– customary legislation. Western law and society, by contrast, have not admitted significant emendation at the hands of another culture for many centuries. From our perspective, then, it can seem that it is the West, not the Islamic world, which stands in

need of reform in a more pluralistic direction. It claims to be open, while we are closed, but in reality, on the ground, seems closed, while we have been open. There is force to this defense but does it help us answer the insistent question of Mr. Fortuyn? Historians would probably argue that since history cannot repeat itself, the demand that Islam experience an Enlightenment is strange, and that if the task be attempted, it cannot remotely guarantee an outcome analogous to that experienced by Europe. If honest and erudite enough, they may also recognize that the Enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought.[72] The implication being that without Islam, the medieval world might have endured forever. However Westerners, unlike the Moors of Cordova, proved less able to tolerate diversity or fecundation by the Other, and their own Renaissance and Enlightenment only added to the European's absolute sense of superiority over other cultures, a prejudice that was augmented further by an escalating positivism that finally dethroned God. Garaudy thus concludes that only by radically challenging its own version of Enlightenment and accepting a Muslim version, rooted in what he calls the Third Heritage (the first two being the Classics and the Bible), will the West save itself from its "deadly hegemonic adventure", and "its suicidal model of growth and civilization."[73]

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

The second dangerous consequence of 'Enlightenment', as Muslims see it, is the replacement of religious autocracy and sacred kingship with either a totalitarian political order, or with a democratic liberal arrangement that has no fail-safe resistance to moving in a totalitarian

direction.[74] The West is loath to refer to this possibility in its makeup and believes that Srebrenica or Mr. Fortuyn, are aberrations, not a recurrent possibility. Muslims, however, surely have the right to express deep unease about the demand to submit to an Enlightenment project that seems to have produced so much darkness as well as light.[75]

Another aspect of the question needs attention here. Western intellectuals now speak of post-modernism as an end of Enlightenment reason. Hence the new Muslim question becomes: why jump into the laundromat if European thinkers have themselves turned it off? Is the Third World to be brought to heel by importing only Europe's yesterdays?[76] Iqbal represents a very different tradition which insists that Islam is only itself when it recognizes that authenticity arises from recognizing the versatility of classical Islam, rather than taking any single reading of the scriptures as uniquely true. *Ijtihad*, after all, is scarcely a modern invention!

An age of decadence, whether or not framed by Enlightenment, is an age of extremes, and the twentieth century was precisely that. Islam has been westernized enough, it sometimes appears, to have joined that logic. We are either neutralized by a supposedly benign Islamic liberalism that in practice allows nothing distinctively Islamic to leave the home or the mosque– an Enlightenment-style privatization of religion that abandons the world to the morality of the market leaders and the demagogues. Or we fall back into the sensual embrace of extremism, justifying our refusal to deal with the real world by dismissing it as absolute evil, as *kufr*, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.[77] Revelation, as always, requires the middle way. Extremism, in any case, never succeeds even on its own terms. It usually repels more people from religion than it holds within it. Attempts to reject all of global modernity simply cannot succeed, and have not succeeded anywhere. To borrow the words of Tim Winter, "A more sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world."[78]

In the final analysis if there is one unredeemable part of the Enlightenment tradition it is the fact that it allowed its critique of illumination, wisdom and the Divine turn into an outright rejection because of the reification of the critique. The flip-side of this reified critique is the fact that the Enlightenment affirmation of individualism, universalism and materialism became a set of reified/dogmatic assertions

based on completely abstract concepts rather than a living (and life-giving) ethos. It is obviously the case that the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment analysis of illumination, wisdom and the Divine laid bare deeply problematic aspects of traditional culture that were not known before. But instead of endeavouring to redress these problematic aspects of traditional culture as a "philosophic healer" using the resources already present in the afflicted paradigm, Enlightenment thought played the role of a colonizing imperialist on a mission to civilize the savages by means of socio-cultural engineering. In short the only unredeemable aspect of the Enlightenment is that its stance towards non-Enlightenment paradigms is one of critique-condemn-replace.

It should not be hard to see where we naturally fit. The gaping hole in the Enlightenment pointed out by the postmodern theologians and by more skeptical but still anxious minds, was the Enlightenment's inability to form a stable and persuasive ground for virtue and hence for what it has called 'citizenship'.[79]

But why are we bound to keep our word? Why need we respect the moral law? Religion seems to answer this far more convincingly than any secular ethic.[80] Religion offers a solution to this fatal weakness. Applied with wisdom, it provides a fully adequate reason for virtue and an ability to produce cultural and political leaders who embody it themselves. Of course, it is all too often applied improperly, and there is something of the Promethean arrogance and hubris of the *philosophes* in the radical insistence that the human subject be enthroned in authority over scriptural interpretation, without a due prelude of initiation, love, and self-naughting. Yet the failure of the Enlightenment paradigm, as invoked by the secular elites in the Muslim world, to deliver moral and efficient government and cultural guidance, indicates that the solution *must* be religious. Religious aberrations do not discredit the principle they aberrantly affirm.

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

have proved irrelevant to our needs.

Are we to conclude that modern Islam, so often sympathetic to the Enlightenment's claims, and in its Islamist version one of their most powerful instantiations, has been deeply mistaken? The totalitarian forms of Enlightenment reason which recurred throughout the twentieth century have discredited it in the eyes of many; and are now less dangerous only because postmodernism seems to have abolished so many of the Enlightenment's key beliefs.[81] If the ideal of freedom is now based less on ideas of inalienable natural rights than on the notion that all truth is relative, then perhaps mainstream Islamist thinking will need to unhitch itself more explicitly from the broadly Western paradigms which it accepted for most of the twentieth century. Yet the relation Islam/Enlightenment seems predicated on simplistic definitions of both. Islamism may be an Enlightenment project, but conservative Sufism (for instance) is probably not. Conversely, even without adopting a postmodern perspective we are not so willing today to assume a necessary antithesis between tradition and reason.[82] The way forward, probably, is to recognize that Islam genuinely converges with Enlightenment concerns on some issues; while on other matters, notably the Enlightenment's individualism and its increasingly Promethean confidence in humanity's autonomous capacities, it is likely to demur radically.

What matters about Islam is that it did not produce the modern world. If modernity ends in a technologically-induced holocaust, then survivors will probably hail the religion's wisdom in not authoring something similar.[83] If, however, it survives, and continues to produce a global monoculture where the past is forgotten, and where international laws and customs are increasingly restrictive of cultural difference, then Islam is likely to remain the world's great heresy. The Ishmaelite alternative is rejected. But what if Ishmael actually wishes to be rejected, since the one who is doing the rejecting has ended up creating a world without God? Grounded in our stubbornly immobile liturgy and doctrine, we Ishmaelites should serve the invaluable, though deeply resented, function of a culture which would like to be an Other, even if that is no longer quite possible!

In the end I would like to quote Schuon's timely remark again that "if human societies degenerate on the one hand with the passage of time they accumulate on the other hand experience in virtue of old age, however intermingled with error their experience may be." It is true that

the world was already in extreme old age two thousand years ago, but that old age lay hidden under the youth of Christianity and then, subsequently, also under the youth of Islam. Nonetheless, its unseen presence below the surface has now precipitated those two latest religions towards itself, that is, in the direction of old age and "as such we have a choice between two attributes offered us by old age, namely senility and wisdom. Despite the fact that the vast majority of our contemporaries have chosen the former of these– whence the present state of the world– it is nonetheless possible and even inevitable that some will choose wisdom, a wisdom that is calm and objective, free from the passionate prejudices which have previously been too dominant in human souls with regard to religions other than their own."[84] We will close this paper with words from the Qur'an, words which might be called the Islamic equivalent of the Christian Credo, a definite statement, on the authority of the Word-made-Book, of the faith of the Prophet and of those who may be considered as the most spiritual of his Companions. *They believe, all of them, in God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers. And they say: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers* (Qur'an, 2, 285).

Notes and References:

1   For the Islamic house of faith, my own wisdom tradition, I have done that separately in one of my short study. See, Muhammad Suheyl Umar, *In the Wake of 11th September, Perspectives on Settled Convictions– Changes and Challenges*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2005.

2   Karen Armstrong, Lecture "The Role of Religion in the New Millennium", Singapore, 18 June 2007.

3   David F. Ford, "God and Our Public Life: A Scriptural Wisdom", The Ebor Lectures, 2006-07, York St John University.

4   Though it, like the others, is understandable in historical terms—working out the epochal, often bloody confrontation between the French Revolution and Roman Catholicism.

5   Expressed, for example, in banning official recognition of any particular religious symbols, holidays or practices and refusing to let state schools teach religious education or state universities teach theology as well as religious studies.

6   Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2004.

7   Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Namah*, in *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 673. For a translation see A. Q. Niaz, *Iqbal's Javid Namah*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1984, p. 329.

8   *Javid Nāma* in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 672-76.

9   Those interested in learning more about some of the criticisms we have in mind might

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

This attitude accompanies the evaluation of 'myth' as a banal and inane narrative. Tribal peoples (representing 'archaic' modes of thought) childishly cling to their myths, infantile fantasies, whereas mature contemporaries jettison myths with the passage of 'historical time' and the entrance' into 'modernity. 'It would be fascinating to study these and other justifications proffered for avoiding a serious encounter with the reality of myth [read: Islamic thought) and symbolic acts.... This is, however, not the place to carry out a history of the 'modern' ideas of myth and religion. It is enough to suggest that the Western cultural imagination turned away when it encountered the stunning variety of cultural worlds that appeared for the first time in the Age of Discovery. Doubtless this inward turn sparked the appearance of all sorts of imaginary realities. The Enlightenment, the withdrawal of Western thinkers from the whirling world of cultural values into an utterly imaginary world of 'objective' forms of knowledge, and its intellectual follow-up coined new symbolic currency. These terms brought new meanings and new self-definition to Western culture: 'consciousness/unconsciousness,' 'primitive/civilized,' 'ethics/mores,' 'law/custom,' 'critical or reflective thought/ action."

10   Frithjof Schuon, "De l' Alliance", *Etudes Traditionnelles*, Paris, June, 1940. The analogy of the sun and the stars is encountered in the works of the greatest authorities of the Islamic tradition also, for example, Shaykh Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī. Keeping in view the fact that the Qur'ān never criticizes the prophetic messages as such, though it often condemns misunderstandings or distortions by those who follow the prophets, one notes that Shaykh Ibn 'Arabī sometimes criticizes specific distortions or misunderstandings in the Qur'ānic vein, but he does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn— that the coming of Islam abrogated *(naskh)* previous revealed religions. Rather, he says, Islam is like the sun and other religions like the stars. Just as the stars remain when the sun rises, so also the other religions remain valid when Islam appears. One can add a point that perhaps Ibn 'Arabī would also accept: What appears as a sun from one point of view may be seen as a star from another point of view.

11   Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, (Vol. III, p. 153, line 12), Dār, Sādir, Beirut, n.d. In this context one often comes across the claims of excellence. To maintain the particular excellence of the Qur'ān and the superiority of Muhammad over all other prophets is not to deny the universal validity of revelation nor the necessity of revelation's appearing in particularized expressions.

12   Frithjof Schuon, "Diversity of Revelation", in M. S. Umar, (Ed.) *The Religious Other—Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2009, pp.

13   Frithjof Schuon, "Letter", in *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, World Wisdom Books, Bloomington, Indiana, 2004.

14 There could be other motives such as the mistaken supposition that the Darwinian theory of evolution has been scientifically proved to be true, whereas it has in fact no scientific basis at all. See Martin, Lings, *The Eleventh Hour*, Ch. 3, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2005; *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, Ch. 1, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2007.

15 Moreover St. Thomas Aquinas says in his *Summa Theologia* that the fact of a Divine Person having manifested Itself in one human nature does not prevent It from doing so in another human nature. It is true that the words of Christ are altogether central to Christianity, whereas the equivalent saying of the Prophet Muhammad cannot be said to have the same place in Islam. We did not however quote them to distinguish this from that, but on the contrary to identify each with the other. Both are expressions of the truth that there is no way to God except through His Word. There is therefore no question here of contradiction between two religions.

16 M. S. Umar, (Ed.) *The Religious Other– Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2009.

17 See Martin Lings, "With all Thy Mind", in the anthology.

18 See *In the Wake of 11th September*, op. cit., p. 10.

19 "Not to mention the antinomy between such claims and the necessary relative character of all religious mythology; only pure metaphysic and pure prayer are absolute and therefore universal. As for 'mythology', it is– apart from its intrinsic content of truth and efficacy– indispensable for enabling metaphysical and essential truth to 'gain a footing' in such and such a human collectivity." Frithjof Schuon, "Diversity of Revelation", in M. S. Umar, (Ed.) *The Religious Other– Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2009, pp.

20 Ibid., p. 20.

21 The usual proof text/argument on the Christian side is that "*no one commeth to the Father except through me*" or same variation of the same theme as we mentioned earlier. 21 It was argued that "*No one commeth to the Father save though the Son.*" What does the word Son mean? If it is the Jesus of Nazareth, so that Jesus in gone. So there is no way that people will get to God through that reference. Is it the risen Christ? Or is it the Christ who is referred to in the first 4 verses in the Gospel of John as the Word or in Greek the "Logos"? In the beginning it was the Word, it was with God the Word was God. Through him all things were made and in some translations, without him nothing was made. If nothing in this whole world and history was made without the Word which was God, in God, that means that Buddha was created by God, Muhammad was created by God. If God made these prophets, these enlightened souls, it is up to me to honour the followers of those originators of the religions made by God. If your religion is the only true religion then God bless you. But I hope you will follow the teachings of your master who tells us to love not just our friends but our enemies. Loving people require that we not bad mouth them. So every religion asks you to live up to that command. It is, however, inconceivable, as Frithjof Schuon has said, that in speaking of the future, Christ should have passed over in silence 'the one unique and incomparable apparition' which was to take place between his two comings; and there can be no doubt, if the following passage from the Gospel of St John be considered objectively, that it refers to the Prophet who is referred to, and who was, in fact,

shortly to be born. The words of Christ are as follows:

I have more to tell you, but ye cannot bear it now. But when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will tell you all things. He shall not speak of himself but what he shall hear that shall he speak and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me. (16: 12-14.)

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

23 The change from first to third person with regard to the Divinity is frequent in the Qur'an.

24 If He had sent only one religion to a world of widely differing affinities and aptitudes, it would not have been a fair test for all. He has therefore sent different religions, specially suited to the needs and characteristics of the different sectors of humanity.

25 V, 48.

26 Muhammad.

27 Qur'an, XL, 78.

28 Muslims.

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

30 V, 69.

31 Ibn Ishaq, gives the standard account of this remarkable event. A. Guillaume (Tr.) *The Life of Muhammad— A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 270-277.

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

33 *Chachnamah Retold—An Account of the Arab Conquest of Sindh*, Gobind Khushalani (New Delhi: Promilla, 2006), p.156

34 Arabised as 'al-Rūr'.

35 Abū al-Hasan al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-buldān* (Beirut: Maktaba al-Hilāl, 1988), p.422-423.

36 Ibid., p.424. See for further discussion, *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan*, S.M. Ikram (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989). It is thus not surprising to read, in the same historian's work, that when Muhammad b. Qāsim died, 'The people of India wept at the death of Muhammad, and made an image of him at Kīraj'.

37 One cannot overlook such acts as the destruction of the monastery at Valabhi by the Abbsasid army in 782. But, to quote the Buddhist scholar, Dr Alexander Berzin, 'The destruction at Valabhi ... was an exception to the general religious trends and official policies of the early Abbasid period. There are two plausible explanations for it. It was either the work of a militant fanatic general acting on his own, or a mistaken operation

ordered because of the Arabs' confusing the local "white-clad" Jains with supporters of Abu Muslim and then not differentiating the Buddhists from the Jains. It was not part of a *jihad* specifically against Buddhism.' See his 'The Historical Interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic Cultures before the Mongol Empire' in his 'The Berzin Archives–the Buddhist Archives of Dr Alexander Berzin'(http://www. berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/e-books/unpublished_manuscripts/historical_interaction/pt2/history_cultures_10.html). The other acts of unprincipled violence by rogue Muslim generals, such as the destruction of the temple of Nalanda by Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1193, are to be seen, likewise, as contrary to 'the general religious trends and official policies' of Muslim states acting in accordance with Islamic precepts. Such acts are thus to be seen as military-political exceptions which prove the religious rule: the religious rights of Hindus and Buddhists, as *dhimmī*s, were sacrosanct. 1193 destruction of Nalanda by Bakhtiyar Khalji

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

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

40 The ultimate goal in such a competition between religious believers is salvation. The performance of 'good works' (*khayrat*) is intended not only to establish moral conduct on earth but also to grant access to that grace by which one attains salvation in the Hereafter. One of the key sources of religious intolerance is the exclusivist notion that one's religion, alone, grants access to salvation, all others being false religions leading nowhere. This exclusivism is summed up in the Roman Catholic formula *extra ecclesiam*

nulla salus: no salvation outside of the Church. This kind of exclusivism has no place in the Qur'anic worldview, as is clearly demonstrated by such verses as the following: *'Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve* (2: 62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69). The only criteria for salvation according to this verse are belief in the Absolute, and in accountability to that Absolute, conjoined to virtue in consequence of these beliefs.* Given this clear expression of the universality of salvation, any lapse into the kind of religious chauvinism which feeds intolerance is impermissible. This is made clear in the following verses, which explicitly mention forms of religious exclusivism which the Muslims had encountered among various communities of the 'People of the Book': *'And they say: "None enters Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian". These are their vain desires. Say: "Bring your proof if you are truthful". Nay, but whosoever submits his purpose to God, and he is virtuous, his reward is with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve* (2:111-112). In other words, the Muslim is not allowed to play the game of religious polemics. Instead of responding in kind to any sort of chauvinistic claims or 'vain desires' aimed at monopolising Paradise, the Muslim is instructed to raise the dialogue to a higher level, and to call for reasoned debate: 'bring your proof'. The Qur'anic position is to affirm the universal salvific criteria of piety, accessible to all human beings, whatever be their religious affiliation. This position is further affirmed in the following verses: *'It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor with the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have its recompense ... And whoso performs good works, whether male or female, and is a believer, such will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged the dint of a date-stone.* (4:123-124) One can read this verse as implying that insofar as the Muslim 'desires' that salvation be restricted to Muslims in the specific, communal sense, he falls into exactly the same kind of exclusivism of which the Christians and Jews stand accused. It should be noted that the very same word is used both for the 'desires' of the Jews and the Christians, and the 'desires' of the Muslims, *amaniyy* (s. *umniyya*). The logic of these verses clearly indicates that one form of religious prejudice is not to be confronted with another form of the same error, but with an objective, unprejudiced recognition of the inexorable and universal law of divine justice, a law which excludes both religious nationalism and its natural concomitant, intolerance.

41   Given the fact that *'there is no compulsion in religion'* (2:256), it follows that differences of opinion must be tolerated and not suppressed. This theme is not unconnected with the principle of divine mercy: just as God's mercy is described as *encompassing all things* (7:156), so divine guidance through revelation encompasses all human communities. The Prophet is described as a *'mercy to the whole of creation'* (21:107), and his character is described as merciful and kind in the Qur'an (9:128); in the traditional sources the trait which is most often used to define the essence of his personality is *hilm*, a forbearance compounded of wisdom and gentleness. The tolerance accorded to the Other by the Prophet is thus an expression not only of knowledge of the universality of revelation, but also of the mercy, love and compassion from which this universal divine will to guide and save all peoples itself springs. Seen thus, the spirit of Islamic tolerance goes infinitely beyond a merely formal toleration of the Other; it is the outward ethical form assumed by one's conformity to the very nature of the divine, which encompasses all things *'in mercy and knowledge'* (40:7). It is also a mode of emulation of the prophetic nature: *'Say [O Muhammad]: If you love God, follow me; God will love you'* (3:31). To follow the Prophet means, among other things, to be gentle and lenient to

all, in accordance with the *hilm* which defined his character: 'It was a mercy from God that you are gently disposed to them; had you been fierce and hard-hearted, they would have fled from you' (3:159). In regard to the disbelievers, then, the Muslim is enjoined to let them go their way unmolested, to let them believe in their own 'religion': 'Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor do you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. For you your religion, for me, mine (109:1-6)'. Returning to the duty to deliver the message and no more, there are a number of verses to note; for example: 'If they submit, they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, you have no duty other than conveying the message ... (3:20)' 'If they are averse, We have not sent you as a guardian over them: your duty is but to convey the message (42:48).'

42 Martin Lings, "With all Thy Mind", in M. S. Umar, (Ed.) *The Religious Other— Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2009, pp. ; Also see Martin Lings, "Why 'With all Thy Mind'", Ch. III, *A Return to the Spirit*. Fons Vitae, 2005, p. 29.

43 Arvind Sharma, "Can Muslims Talk to Hindus?" in

44 Sharma has used the translation of Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: The New American Library, 1972), p. 369.

45 "That "ethic and cultural diversity are part of God's plan, as the Qur'an confirms (49:13)" was a fact accepted [sic. Even] by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), see Tamara Sonn, *A Brief History of Islam* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 127. The verse however is cited here in the context of internal diversity within Islam.

46 I am... kind. By "the crescent and the cross" is meant the historic confrontation between Islam and Christianity that took the form of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Iqbal is saying that, unlike many other Muslims, who remain mentally imprisoned in the past, allowing their thought and action to be determined by certain crucial events of former times, he is more concerned about the momentous developments taking place in the present age. Iqbal does not specify what he means by "an ordeal of a different kind" (*fitnah-i digari*)—whether he means a particular major development, like communism, or whether he uses the singular "ordeal" in a generic sense to refer to several major and decisive developments taking place on the world stage. The main point of the verse, in any case, is that the issues of the present and the future have greater claim on one's attention than issues belonging to a past that may have no more than historical or academic importance. In the second hemistich, "the womb of time" is a translation of *damir-i ayyam*, which literally means "in the insides of time." See M. Mir, (ed.), *Iqbal-Namah*, Vol. 5, No. 3-4, Summer and Fall, 2005, p. 3-6.

47

فکر، فرنگ پیش، مجاز آورد سجود
بینای کور و مست، تماشای رنگ و بوست
مشرق خراب و مغرب از آن بیشتر خراب
عالم تمام مرده و بی ذوق جستجوست

Zubūr i 'Ajam, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbāl*, (Persian), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 376.

48 F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, reprinted, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2004, pp. 26.

49 That science had changed our world beyond recognition went without saying, but it was the way that it had changed our worldview that concerns us here. More

importantly, the two worldviews are contending for the mind of the future. The scientific worldview is a wasteland for the human spirit. It cannot provide us the where withal for a meaningful life. How much, then, is at stake? That is the fundamental question. The overarching question relates to the view of Reality; of the *WORLDVIEWS: THE BIG PICTURE*. It is of great consequence to ask as to WHO WAS RIGHT ABOUT REALITY: TRADITIONALISTS, MODERNISTS, OR THE POSTMODERNS? The problem, according to our lights, is that somewhere, during the course of its historical development, western thought took a sharp turn in a different direction. It branched off as a tangent from the collective heritage of all humanity and claimed the autonomy of reason. It chose to follow reason alone, unguided by revelation and cut off from its transcendent root. Political and social realms quickly followed suit. Autonomous statecraft and excessive individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful. There are five places where these contradict each other.

- According to the traditional, religious view spirit is fundamental and matter derivative. The scientific worldview turns this picture on its head.

- In the religious worldview human beings are the less who have derived from the more. Science reverses this etiology, positioning humanity as the more that has derived from the less; devoid of intelligence at its start, evolving and advancing to the elevated stature that we human beings now enjoy.

- The traditional worldview points toward a happy ending; the scientific worldview does not. As for the scientific worldview, there is no way that a happy ending can be worked into it. Death is the grim reaper of individual lives, and whether things as a whole will end in a freeze or a fry, with a bang or a whimper is anybody's guess.

- This fourth contrast between the competing worldviews concerns meaning. Having been intentionally created by omnipotent Perfection– or flowing from it "like a fountain ever on,"– the traditional world is meaningful throughout. In the scientific worldview, meaning is minimal if not absent. "Our modern understanding of evolution implies that ultimate meaning in life is nonexistent." Science acknowledges that "the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless."

- In the traditional world people feel at home. Nothing like this sense of belonging can be derived from the scientific worldview which is the dawning of "the age of homelessness."

An age comes to a close when people discover they can no longer understand themselves by the theory their age professes. For a while its denizens will continue to think that they believe it, but they feel otherwise and cannot understand their feelings. This has now happened to our world. Current worldview is not scien*tific* but *scientistic*. It continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature or the natural order/natural world, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview– not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear. This important point is not generally recognized, so I shall spell it out. The death-knell to modernity, which had science as its source and hope, was sounded with the realization

that despite its power in limited regions, six things slip through its controlled experiments in the way sea slips through the nets of fishermen:

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

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

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

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

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

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

50 Already at the opening of the last century, when Postmodernism had not yet emerged on the scene, Yeats was warning that things were falling apart, that the centre didn't hold. Gertrude Stein followed him by noting that "in the twentieth century nothing is in agreement with anything else," and Ezra Pound saw man as "hurling himself at indomitable chaos"– the most durable line from the play *Green Pastures* has been, "Everything that's tied down is coming loose." T. S. Eliot found "The Wasteland" and "The Hollow Men" as appropriate metaphors for the outward and the inward aspects of our predicament. It is not surprising, therefore, that when in her last interview Rebecca West was asked to name the dominant mood of our time, she replied, "A desperate search for a pattern." The search is desperate because it seems futile to look for a pattern when reality has become, in Roland Barth's vivid image, kaleidoscopic. With every tick of the clock the pieces of experience come down in new array. The views about the prevailing human predicament converge. Fresh "infusions" are needed. The opinions about the nature and origin of these fresh "infusions" that could rectify or change it for the better are, however, divergent. Some of our cotemporaries try to find an alternative from within the dominant paradigm. Others suggest the possibility of a search for these fresh "infusions" in a different direction: different cultures, other civilizations, religious doctrines, sapiential traditions.

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

52 Fortuyn's religious views are detailed in his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, published in 1997 (cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163) to celebrate Israel's fiftieth birthday. He believed that Islam, unlike his own strongly-affirmed Christianity, is a 'backward culture', with an inadequate view of God and an inbuilt hostility to European culture. He called for

massive curbs on Muslim immigration, and for greater stress on Holland's Christian heritage. A prominent homosexual activist, Fortuyn also condemned Islam's opposition to same-sex marriage. Cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right*, London, 2002, 163.

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

54   The spectacle of Muslim Ottoman tolerance was something to which Christendom was used: 'Better the turban of the Sultan than the mitre of the Pope', was a well-worn saying among Eastern Orthodox Christians, acutely aware of the fact that their rights were more secure under the Ottomans than under their Catholic co-religionists. Ottoman conquest was followed almost without exception by Islamic tolerance of the conquered peoples.

55   She argues convincingly that this Ottoman tolerance decisively influenced the process leading to the famous Edict of Torda in 1568, issued by King John Sigismund of Transylvania (which was under Ottoman suzerainty), an edict hailed by western historians as expressing 'the first European policy of expansive religious toleration.' Susan Ritchie, 'The Islamic Ottoman Influence on the Development of Religious Toleration in Reformation Transylvania', in *Seasons*—Semi-annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute, vol.2, no.1, pp.62, 59.

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

57   Many Jews fleeing from persecution in central Europe would have received letters like the following, written by Rabbi Isaac Tzarfati, who reached the Ottomans just before their capture of Constantinople in 1453, replying to those Jews of central Europe who were calling out for help: 'Listen, my brethren, to the counsel I will give you. I too was born in Germany and studied Torah with the German rabbis. I was driven out of my native country and came to the Turkish land, which is blessed by God and filled with all good things. Here I found rest and happiness ... Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes, and our commerce is free and unhindered ... every one of us lives in peace and freedom. Here the Jew is not compelled to wear a yellow hat as a badge of shame, as is the case in Germany, where even wealth and great fortune are a curse for the Jew because he therewith arouses jealousy among the Christians ... Arise, my brethren, gird up your loins, collect your forces, and come to us. Here you will be free of your enemies, here you will find rest ...,' Quoted in S. A. Schleifer, 'Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History', in *The Spirit of Palestine* (Barcelona, 1994), p. 8.

58   As Erwin Rosenthal writes, 'The Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more

formative and positive time in our long and chequered history than that under the empire of Islam.' One particularly rich episode in this 'golden age' was experienced by the Jews of Muslim Spain.

59   Such great Jewish luminaries as Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol wrote their philosophical works in Arabic, and were fully 'at home' in Muslim Spain. With the expulsion, murder or forced conversion of all Muslims and Jews following the *reconquista* of Spain—brought to completion with the fall of Granada in 1492—it was to the Ottomans that the exiled Jews turned for refuge and protection. They were welcomed in Muslim lands throughout north Africa, joining the settled and prosperous Jewish communities already there.

60   We have the following interesting contemporary testimony to the practice of Muslim tolerance, from within the Christian community itself. In the middle of the 10th century embassies were exchanged between the court of Otto I of Germany and court of Cordoba. One such delegation was led by John of Gorze in 953 who met the resident bishop of Cordoba, who explained to him, how the Christians survived: "*We have been driven to this by our sins, to be subjected to the rule of the pagans. We are forbidden by the Apostle's words to resist the civil power. Only one cause of solace is left to us, that in the depths of such a great calamity, they do not forbid us to practise our own faith … For the time being, then, we keep the following counsel: that provided no harm is done to our religion, we obey them in all else, and do their commands in all that does not affect our faith.* Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent—Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York/London, 2004), p. 48.

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

62   Mark Cohen, 'Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History', in *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no.38, 1986, p.135.

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

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

In Denmark, the rapidly-growing ultranationalist DPP has become the third most popular party, benefiting from widespread popular dislike of Muslims. Its folksy housewife-leader Pia Kiaersgaard opposes entry into the Eurozone, rails against

'welfare cheats', and is famous for her outbursts against Islam. 'I think the Muslims are a problem,' she stated in a recent interview. 'It's a problem in a Christian country to have too many Muslims.' [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/far_right/]

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

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

The influential American commentator R.D. Kaplan, much admired by Bill Clinton, thought that '[a] cultural curtain is descending in Bosnia to replace the [Berlin] wall, a curtain separating the Christian and Islamic worlds.' [Cited by Lueg, op. cit., p.11] Again, those who travelled through that 'curtain' can do no more than record that the opposite appeared to be the case. Far from reducing to essences, in this case, a pacific, pluralistic Christianity confronting a totalitarian and belligerent Islam, the Bosnian war, despite its complexities, usually presented a pacific, defensive Muslim community struggling for a multiethnic vision of society against a Christian aggressor committed to preserving the supposed ethnic hygiene of local Christendom. In Bosnia the stereotypes were so precisely reversed that it is remarkable that they could have survived at all. Here the Christians were the 'Oriental barbarians', while the Muslims represented the 'European ideal' of parliamentary democracy and conviviality. Neither can we explain away the challenge to stereotypes by asserting that religion was a minor ingredient in the very secularized landscape of post-Titoist Yugoslavia. The Bosnian President was a mosque-going Muslim who had been imprisoned for his beliefs under the Communists. The Muslim religious hierarchy had

been consistent in its support for a multiethnic, integrated Bosnian state. Ranged against them were all the forces of the local Christian Right, as the Greek Orthodox synod conferred its highest honour, the Order of St Denis of Xante, on Serb radical leader Radovan Karadzic. Ignoring the unanimous verdict of human rights agencies, the Greek Synod apparently had no qualms about hailing him as 'one of the most prominent sons of our Lord Jesus Christ, working for peace.' [Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 85.]

65   This is, if you like, its Ishmaelite uniqueness: the religions that spring from Isaac (*a.s.*), are, in our understanding, an extension of Hebrew and Occidental particularity, while Islam is universal. Islam's civilizational eminence stemmed from a spectacular plenitude.

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

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

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

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

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

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

72   Particularly the Islamized version of Aristotle which, via Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalized dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of credal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion

of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain. It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. The case for classical Islam as an enlightenment that succeeded in retaining the sovereignty of God thus seems a credible one. It has been made with particular elegance by Roger Garaudy, for whom its highest expression unfolded in medieval Cordova, a city which witnessed a combination of revealed and rational wisdom so sophisticated that it was a 'first Renaissance'. Saint-Simon and others had claimed that the Middle Ages ended once Arab science was transmitted to the West. Also see Luce Lopez-Baralt, The Sufi Trobar Clus, IAP, Lahore, 2000. For the humanities, George Makdisi traces European humanism to Islamic antecedents72 saying that '"the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the reception of both movements, scholasticism and humanism, from classical Islam by the Christian Latin West."

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

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

       Another voice from deep in the American Jewish intellectual tradition that many in the Muslim world assume provides the staunchest advocates of the Enlightenment. This time it is Irving Greenberg: "*The humanistic revolt for the 'liberation' of humankind from centuries of dependence upon God and nature has been shown to sustain a capacity for demonic evil. Twentieth-century European civilization, in part the product of the Enlightenment and liberal culture, was a Frankenstein that authored the German monster's being. [...] Moreover, the Holocaust and the failure to confront it make a repetition more likely - a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone - and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood.* (Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism, Christianity and Partnership after the Twentieth Century', in Frymer-Kensky, *op. cit.*, 26.)

75   Iqbal, identifying himself with the character Zinda-Rud in his *Javid Nama (Pilgrimage of Eternity)*, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'raj: *Inqilab-i Rus u Alman dide am*: 'I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany!' Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes, by Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1966), 140. This in a great, final crying-out to God.

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

77   Traditional Islam, as is scripturally evident, cannot sanction either policy. Extremism, however, has been probably the more damaging of the two. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both narrate from A'isha, *(r.a.)*, the hadith that runs: 'Allah loves kindness is all matters.' Imam Muslim also narrates from Ibn Mas'ud, *(r.a.)*, that the Prophet

(*salla'Llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*) said: 'Extremists shall perish' (*halaka 'l-mutanatti'ūn*). Commenting on this, Imam al-Nawawi defines extremists as 'fanatical zealots' (*al-muta'ammiqūn al-ghālūn*), who are simply 'too intense' (*al-mushaddidūn*).

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

79 David Hume expressed the problem as follows: If the reason be asked of that obedience which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer: *Because society could not otherwise subsist*; and this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, *Because we should keep our word*. But besides that, nobody, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer; besides this, say, you find yourself embarrassed when it is asked, *Why we are bound to keep our word?* Nor can you give any answer but what would immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance. David Hume, *Essays* (Oxford, 1963), 469.

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

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

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

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

84 Martin Lings, *A Return to the Spirit*, Fons Vitae, 2005, p. 28.