

ISLAM AT THE DAWN OF THE NEW CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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

Before discussing any other matter, it must be noted that the element of faith (*īmān*) in Islam and the practice of its tenets remains very strong among the vast majority of Muslims and if anything have become strengthened rather than weakened in the last decades of the 20th century among the modernized classes and also among people such as the Palestinians, Bosnians, Chechnians and Kosovars who have suffered great tragedies during these years. One usually counts the followers of various religions quantitatively and assert, let us say, that there are some fifty million Christians in France and fifty-five million Muslims in Egypt. But such accounts veil the question of the degree of attachment to one's faith. It is enough to visit a major Cairo mosque such as Sayyidina Àusayn's and a major

church in Paris such as St. Sulpice to observe the difference involved at this point of history. This is not to say that there are not numerous devout Christians outside of Europe and many in Europe itself. Rather, this difference is mentioned so that those acquainted only with the situation of Christianity and Judaism in Western secular societies do not judge the place and role of Islam in the Islamic world in the same manner. The presence of faith and the following of religious prescriptions especially the acts of worship (*ibadat*) in Islam, which should be compared more to the practice of Christianity in the West in pre-modern days rather than today, is bound to continue and there is no sign that in the near future at least the forces of secularism will be able to affect Muslim faith and worship in the same ways that they affected the faith and practice of Christianity in Europe during the past few centuries and especially in recent times. This having been said, it is also necessary to assert that the quality and depth of faith has diminished and its vision narrowed among many Muslims and especially the light of Truth has become more difficult to find and paths leading to its attainment less accessible than before in accordance with the predictions of the Qur'an concerning the latter days.

While faith in Islam has remained strong and is bound to continue to be so into the foreseeable future for most Muslims, Islamic civilization which was created on the basis of the Qur'anic revelation and through integration of pre-existing elements in accord with the Islamic view, helping to create a totally Islamic ambience, both material and intellectual, began to be seriously threatened from the 19th century onward with the spread of colonialism and modernism in the Islamic world. Since Islam is a total way of life, the partial destruction of its civilization, as observed in the domains of education, culture, art and architecture, etc., has had an impact on the all encompassing character of the religion and the degree of the Muslims attachment to its all-embracing tenets and must therefore also be considered in any projection that one makes about Islam as a religion in the narrower sense of the term in the coming century. Interestingly enough, while the presence of secularism and modernism upon the Islamic world have increased rather than decreased during the past half century along with the nominal independence of Muslim countries, and despite further devastation of the traditional living space of Muslims, there is now also observable an attempt to revive Islamic civilization itself. The current call for the dialogue of civilizations which came originally from Iran recently and has been adopted as a theme for the United

Nations for the year 2001, is itself a sign of the Muslims' desire to preserve their distinct civilization despite the numerous challenges which such an undertaking faces in its encounter with forces of much greater worldly strength. To ponder upon the future of Islam, it is therefore necessary not only to deal with the religion but also to delve into civilizational factors which are directly related to the faith as well as into the challenges which Islam faces as both a religion and a world civilization spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific and with an ever more significant presence as a religion in Europe and America.

To understand the present state of Islam and hence its most likely immediate future, it must be remembered that Islam does not function within the same politico-social matrix as does Christianity in the West. In the Occident from the end of the Middle Ages onward, Christianity became ever more marginalized from the domain of public life and also from the arena of intellectual activity by forces which were born and nourished from within the Christian European society of the day and not as a result of external domination. In contrast Islamic countries, with few exceptions, were dominated directly or indirectly by external colonial powers which even after their departure left behind a political class which, although native, possessed a mental perspective akin to the worldview of the West and distinct from the prevailing beliefs and *Weltanschauung* of the vast majority of those over whom they ruled in the name of independence and nationalism. Nor has this situation changed in most places even today. Islam is challenged in many parts of the Islamic world not only from the outside but also by the so-called "ruling elite" which relies upon the power of the West and could not survive for long without its support. Obviously this situation poses a major challenge for Islam which cannot accept the privatisation and subjectivization of religion and does not enjoy the freedom to respond creatively on the basis of its own nature and genius to the problems that the modern world poses for it.

In this context the question of law is particularly significant. As is well known, Islamic possesses a Sacred Law (*al-sharā'ah*) which is as central to it as theology is to Christianity. This Law has its roots in the Qur'«n and the wont (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ and is immutable in its principles and yet a growing reality like a tree whose roots are firmly sunk in the earth, while its branches grow from season to season. For the traditional Muslim, the *sharā'ah* represents the concrete embodiment of the Divine Will and to

practice Islam means to follow the *sharâ'ab*. Now, in most Islamic countries, during the 19th century the *sharâ'ab* was set aside in favour of various European codes by either the colonial powers or modernized Muslims themselves influenced by Western ideas of secular law which was based on premises very different from the Islamic conception which sees God as the ultimate Lawgiver (*al-Shari'*), a view which would be easily understood and in fact confirmed by orthodox Jews and in the realm of moral laws by Christians as well. But for Muslims the *sharâ'ab* concerns not only moral laws but also everyday laws which govern human society.

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

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

even those that possess a traditional structure, are controlled by either the modernists or by so-called fundamentalists but not by traditional Islam which, however, remains strong and manifests its influence within structures controlled by other groups and is likely to continue to do so in the near future while its power and influence increases intellectually and spiritually especially among the more modern educated classes.

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

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

knowledge. The traditional Islamic schools and universities (*madrasahs*) reflected this view of knowledge in their curriculum, philosophy of education, content of course, etc.

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

And yet, during the past few decades voices have arisen in the Islamic world about the danger of a secularised science for the Islamic worldview and for the Islamic religion itself especially since Islam is a religion based upon the knowledge of the nature of reality which ultimately issues from and returns to Reality (*al-haqāqah*) or God Himself one of whose Names is *al-Āqq* or Truth/Reality. Islamic responses to this issue have been diverse and different views continue to be debated as to what is "Islamic science" and whether the Islamic world should develop its own Islamic science or simply adopt modern secularised science. There have been no responses to this question that have been universally accepted by all the intellectual elements involved in such debates. But at least since we began to discuss these matters forty years ago and challenged the prevalent views of many Muslim thinkers, both modern and traditional, who for different reasons were preaching the blind acceptance of modern science, the intellectual scene in the Islamic world has changed a great deal and there are now many voices concerned with the deeper theological and spiritual questions issuing from the confrontation of the Islamic religion and modern science. As we enter the new Christian millennium this issue is bound to remain central to Islamic religious and theological thought. Furthermore, it is also likely that inter-religious dialogue especially between Islam and Christianity that has been

taking place during the past decades will spread more and more into the domain of the relation between religion and science.

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

The question of integrating Western modes of learning into the Islamic perspective and creating a single educational system, which would be Islamic and yet able to expand to include modern disciplines, began to occupy the mind of many Muslim intellectuals from the fifties and sixties onward and led to the first world conference on Islamic education held in Mecca in 1977. This effort led to the establishment of several Islamic universities, the preparation of integrated curricula, etc. and the movement called the “Islamization of knowledge”. Although these efforts have not been completely satisfactory, they remain a major Islamic intellectual concern. How to make educational institutions imported from the West more Islamic or expand existing traditional *madrasabs* to embrace modern disciplines is debated across the Islamic world and many different solutions have been proposed and implemented ranging from the integration of the oldest of all Islamic traditional *madrasabs*, the Qarawiyyân, in Morocco as the Faculty of Theology within the modern University of Rabat, to the expansion of the greatest centre of Sunni learning, al-Azhar in Cairo, to include schools of medicine and engineering to the creation of creative interaction in Persia between the traditional *madrasabs* of Qom, Mashhad, etc.—also called

Āamẓab— with the Western style universities. None of these attempts has as yet been totally successful. But the effort continues as an ongoing project and is bound to continue in future years as a central concern of Islamic thought. The great impact of this issue and how it is resolved upon Islam and Islamic society can hardly be exaggerated.

Closely related to both the issues of science and education is that of modern technology which continues to penetrate in an ever greater degree into the Islamic world, as elsewhere, supported as it is by governments for both internal and external reasons with which we cannot deal in this essay. In an earlier period the Islamic world did have its Luddites, but in recent decades few obstacles have been placed before the rapid spread of Western technology and few Muslim thinkers have bothered to delve into the religious and spiritual implications of the use of the modern machine on a vast scale. If anything many of the more recent religious leaders, even those who support traditional views theologically, have championed the wholesale adoption of Western technology with as great a rapidity as possible and this holds true whether one is speaking of Saudi Arabia with its traditional monarchy or Persia with its Islamic revolutionary government. In Persia, where in such cities as Qom, the religious centre of the country, the traditional scholars '*ulama*' remained until recently aloof from modern modes of life affected to an ever-greater degree by modern technology, matters have changed to such a degree that now most religious students in Qom have mastery of the use of the computer. Some visitors have in fact reported that the libraries of Qom are more "advanced" than the Vatican library in making their holdings available on the Internet.

This attitude of indifference to the religious, moral and spiritual consequences of modern technology in the Islamic world is now, however, beginning to change for two reasons: problems issuing from modern genetic engineering along with related activities and the environmental crisis both of which are directly caused by the implementation of modern technology. The intrusion of modern medicine into the very fabric of human life and of the penetration of genetic engineering into the inner structure of living things have caused much alarm not only among many Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and followers of other religions, but also in many Islamic circles as have the ethical implications of organ transplants and the like not to speak of cloning. As for the environment, the rapid deterioration of the natural environment globally has caused many Muslims, who thought until recently

that this was simply a Western problem, to turn reluctantly to the issue of Islam's attitudes and teachings about the environment. There is no doubt that in coming years both of these issues, which are in fact interrelated on many levels, will become more and more central to Islam on both a theoretical and a practical level as they have become for Christianity. Islam has to reformulate in terms that are clearly understood by the present generation its philosophy or rather theology and metaphysics of nature, to which so many verses of the Qur'«n are devoted. It must also clarify its ethical teachings concerning the non-human world and expand the teachings of the *sharā'ah* upon foundations already contained therein to embrace a full fledged environmental ethics based upon the Islamic religion and not simply a rationalistic philosophy which would create an ethics that would have no efficacy among the vast majority of Muslims. Such efforts are also bound to be of great importance in the future for Islamic intellectual life as well as for the daily life of the Islamic community.

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

On the most palpable level there is the ever-increasing bombardment of Islamic society, and especially its youth, with the products of Western and especially American pop culture and the hedonistic aspects of Western life. The new media do not emphasize the presentation of the music of Virgil Thompson or Leonard Bernstein but of rock and roll (one should not forget the lewd meaning of the term rock when it was first used in this context), not

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

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

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

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

There are many other realms in which Western ideas have forced or been catalysts for responses within the Islamic world. Since Islam is not only a private religion but one that is also concerned with society in all its aspects, a

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

With the traditional political institutions especially the caliphate and the sultanate described by classical Islamic thinkers destroyed in most Islamic lands, the question of the form of government, the source of its legitimacy, the relation between its authority and that of the *sharâ'ah* as interpreted by the traditional scholars (*'ulama'*), and the place for the voice of the people and the *'ulama'* loom large on the horizon. There is little doubt that in the coming century of the Christian calendar much of the energy and attention of Islamic thinkers will be devoted to these issues and the means to achieve the goal of greatly political unity among Muslim peoples and nations. Moreover, the different attempts made during this century to define what is an Islamic state from traditional models of Morocco and Saudi Arabia to three different understandings of the Islamic state in the neighbouring countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan will surely continue. There is bound to be a fluid

and unstable situation in many lands, pitting so-called fundamentalists against Western supported modernists and each one against the traditionalists and in some cases modernists against Western supported traditional institutions with the colour of an earlier form of so-called fundamentalism as seen in Saudi Arabia.

In many Muslim countries Islamic political thought is now also much concerned with the question of freedom and its meaning in an Islamic context, with democracy and participation of the people in the political process and many other issues for which the West has often been a catalyst although for economic and political reasons of self interest the West has not been particularly anxious to support those who speak of Islamic democracy within the Islamic world, at least not in countries whose governments are favourable to the West. Such concerns also of course include the issue of human rights, which is defended in the West for the most part on a secularist basis. In the Islamic world there are those who claim that this issue is simply a part of the arsenal of Western policy to be used when convenient. There are others who are trying to define human rights from the point of view of Islam and in light of human responsibility before God which always preceded human rights in classical Islamic thought which has taught that God gave man social rights as well as certain rights over the world of nature in light of man's responsibility before God concerning himself, human society and God's creation. Religious thinking along those lines is bound to continue in the future and there is likely to be much cooperation between Muslim thinkers and those in the West and elsewhere who speak of the necessity of a global declaration of human responsibility before over-emphasis of only human rights puts an end to human life on earth.

As with politics so with economics, Islamic thought has had to concern itself with issues posed for it by modern economic systems based upon philosophies alien to the ethos of Islam. In response to economic theories and practices of both capitalism and socialism, Islamic thinkers have dealt extensively in recent decades with what has come to be known as Islamic economics. These types of intellectual activity as well as applications to concrete situations are not only of concern to economics but also to Islam itself as a religion as Muslims see it. In fact, Islam has never separated economics from ethics and what is called economics today has always been envisaged and practiced in the Islamic world in the context of the *sharā'ah*. Furthermore, Islamic thought cannot remain impervious to many current

economic theories and practices such as charging of interest and consumerism. With the pressure increasing to create a global economy, the Islamic world is bound to continue to experience external and internal pressure to conform even more than before to foreign economic ideas and practices. But by token of the same fact, activity in the realm of what is now known as Islamic economics is bound to continue and in fact increase and a significant part of Islamic intellectual efforts is bound to be concerned in the future with Islamic economics including the question of economic justice and the implementation of Islamic ideas in situations ever more difficult than what one finds today.

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

This having been said, it is necessary to add that since the encounter with modernism, many Muslim thinkers have tried through different means to create a new chapter in Islamic theology (*kalām*). This effort in fact goes back to Muhammad ‘Abduh and the late 13th/19th century although that early effort was quite limited and for the most part unsuccessful. This type of activity is bound to increase in the future especially as more and more of those Muslims educated in traditional *madrasahs* become acquainted more deeply with Western thought and the roots of prevalent Western ideas. In fact the Islamic response to the challenges of modern and post-modern thought have deepened during the past few decades and are bound to continue to do so in coming years. The trend begun in several Islamic countries to teach what the Persians call *kalām-i jadād* or “new theology” is bound to continue and expand. This “new theology” is not, however, a break with traditional theologies as has happened in many churches in the West, but applications of Islamic principles to new challenges posed by modernism, ranging from Darwinism to Comptism to Freudianism to logical positivism and more recently to deconstructionalism and the like.

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

In the 19th century Wahhabism set itself strongly against Shi‘ism with tragic consequences in Iraq and Arabia. But from the 1950’s onward a strong movement was begun in Egypt in cooperation with Iran to create peace and better mutual understanding between Sunnism and Shi‘ism. The center established in Cairo by the then Shaykh al-Azhar Ma‘Āmēd Shaltēt with the aid of a number of Shi‘ite ‘*ulama*’ was known as *dār al-taqrīb* and its function was similar to that of ecumenical organizations which have sought to create better understanding among various Christian churches. From that date onward the ‘*ulama*’ of both Sunnism and Shi‘ism (excluding of course most

Wahh**ab**â/Salafâ scholars) have been in favour of better mutual understanding and respect and have been closer to each other than perhaps at any other period of Islamic history.

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

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

The continued vitality of Islam as a faith also implies continuity in the creation of sacred art in this tradition, whether it be calligraphy, architecture, or Qur'«nic psalmody, all of which make possible the experience of the

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

The rise of interest in Sufism is also related to the need for the solution of another major challenge faced by Islam, namely the diversity of religions or what is currently being called religious pluralism. Christian theology has been concerned with this issue for many decades and numerous Western Christian theologians and philosophers of religion, both Catholic and Protestant, have tried to create a “theology of religious pluralism” in a Christian context. The Qur’^{ān} is perhaps the most universalist of all sacred scriptures in the sense of asserting openly that religion begins with the origin of the human state itself, that God has revealed religion to all peoples and that He has created diverse religions so that followers of various religions would vie with each other in piety and virtue. On the basis of these teachings, many scholars and theologians throughout Islamic history showed much interest in what has now come to be known as comparative religion or *Religionwissenschaft*. But it was most of all the Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabā and Rēmā who expounded the meaning of this universality and during this century it was from the same Sufi tradition that those in the West such as René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon who spoke of the unity of traditions and the “transcendent unity of religions” drew their inspiration. It remained for the latter and several other traditional authors to expound for today’s humanity the Qur’^{ān}ic doctrine of the universality of revelation in its fullness.

The question of religious diversity is among the most widely discussed in the Islamic world today and there is much interest among Muslim thinkers to carry out religious dialogue not only with Christians and Jews but also with Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, Taoists and others. Most likely this trend will

continue and expand in the future drawing a larger number of Muslim thinkers into circles of discussion and necessitating a more general appreciation of the classical Sufi and contemporary traditionalist metaphysics which alone can provide a matrix for the understanding of religious diversity without relativization and sacrifice of “the sense of the Absolute” which lies at the heart of religion. One cannot imagine the future of Islamic intellectual activity without this strand of thought constituting one of its main elements.



In light of what has been said, it might be asked whether Islam and post-modernism can co-exist. If Islam is understood as a total way of life embracing the domains of action as well as thought, the external as well as the inner world of its adherents, then the answer to this question is no in the same way that Islam as a totality cannot co-exist with modernism. Post-modernism opposes in many ways the theses of modernism but not in the direction of the re-assertion of the reality of the Sacred and intellectual and spiritual certitude. On the contrary it opposes all forms of certitude, all “absolutes”, all that is permanent and abiding. It seeks to deconstruct the sacred structures of religion and even sacred scripture itself. While modernism emphasized rationality and rationalism, post-modernism rejects even the knowledge gained by the use of man’s limited reason not to speak of the intellect and revelation which are the twin sources of ultimate knowledge in all traditions including Islam. For Islam to co-exist with such a worldview would mean accepting that which is opposed totally to all for which Islam stands, to the acceptance of the Absolute and our total surrender to the revelation which descends from It. Co-existence is in fact itself problematic unless one speaks from the point of view of expediency. Co-existence means the existence of one reality besides another. In principle that cannot be accepted if one of the realities is based on the negation of the Divine and the very ground upon which the other worldview stands substituting for it a radical secularist understanding of the nature of man and the world and the goal of human society. The Sacred demands of us all that we are and as Christ said, a house divided unto itself cannot stand.

On the plane of practicality and expediency, however, the matter must be seen in a different light. Islam can exist and function in any ambience which gives its followers the freedom to practice their religion at least inwardly and privately if not in the general public arena and such an ambience could include one dominated by post-modernism as one sees in many

contemporary Western societies. In fact the very relativization of values and cultural norms preached by post-modernism, while seeking to destroy sacred traditions and trivializing them while superficially accepting certain of their tenets, allows at the same time a certain “space” to be created within which religions, whether they be Judaism, Christianity or Islam or for that matter Hinduism and Buddhism can be practiced to some extent. But of course such “spaces” are not allowed to cover the whole living space of the post-modern world and therefore conflicts are bound to arise in certain domains as we see even in the case of Christianity and Judaism, which have existed in the West for two millennia.

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

Questions such as the relation of religion to politics, the nature of knowledge, the source of ethics, the relation of private ethics to public life, the rapport between religion and science (including the social and human sciences) and many other issues which are of concern to post-modern philosophers are also of great interest to Islamic thought. There is every possibility of dialogue and discourse on such subjects and some have in fact already taken place. Through such discourse Islamic thought is bound to make a greater impact on the general intellectual and cultural discourse in the West than before and such discussions are also bound to affect issues and

subjects of religious thought in the Islamic world itself. But this does not mean co-existence on the intellectual and principal plane unless Islam gives up its claim to the truth and the possibility of its attainment as have the typical post-modern thinkers or if post-modernism relinquishes its views and ceases to be post-modernism. As far as Islam is concerned, that possibility of the acceptance of the relative as the only meaningful category and the banning of the very category of truth from intellectual discourse is suicidal and most unlikely.

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



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

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

That link (*ittiĀ*) is beyond all externalities, beyond all temporal and spatial exigencies. In no matter what situation a Muslim finds himself or herself temporally or spatially, he or she can practice Islam faithfully by remaining aware of that inner link and by surrendering his or her will to that of the “Lord of man”. The more difficult question is now to remain faithfully a Muslim externally in a world, which in so many ways denies the reality of the Sacred and the rights of God. Within the Islamic world the problem is how to live according to the *Sharā‘ah* and as part of the *ummah* in a world in which the homogeneity of the traditional ambience has been destroyed, where the Sacred Law is no longer the “law of the land” in many places, where nationalism has segmented the unity of the *ummah*, where many

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

As far as Muslims living as a minority whether in the West, India, Burma, Russia, China or any other country are concerned, their situation is similar inwardly to Muslims living in *d«r al-isl«m* or Abode of Islam itself. What is different is that they do not bear responsibility for general norms and law of the society in which they live but they do bear the responsibility for living righteously as Muslims and protecting the possibility of living within their homes and communities as Muslims. Strangely enough, this latter task is now more difficult for Muslims living in such lands as China, Burma and parts of India, countries in which they have lived for many centuries and in some places for over a millennium, than in the West. This is paradoxical because in older days Europe was more virulently opposed to an Islamic presence on its soil than the Asian societies mentioned as can be seen by the destiny of Muslims in Spain after an eight hundred year presence. Today, however, the situation is reversed if we exclude the incredible genocides of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo in recent years to say nothing of the Russian brutalities in Chechnya. There are now sizable Islamic communities in most European countries and Islam has become part of the mainstream religious scene in

America. For those Muslims living in the West, the challenges of a secular and hedonistic culture are greater than in non-Western societies but there also exists the freedom to practice their religion, at least privately, especially in America where certain constraints seen in France and some other European countries are not to be found although local problems continue to manifest themselves here and there. In these circumstances the way to live faithfully as a Muslim is essentially to practice the faith individually and strengthening the local Islamic communities to the extent possible without there being the burdens of responsibility for society at large which living in an Islamic society places upon the shoulders of Muslims who are members of such a society. It remains the duty of all minority Muslims who claim to practice their religion to remain steadfast in clinging to that inner “link”, in surrendering themselves to God’s Will and in practicing Islamic ethics to the highest degree that they are able to do. It also means to bear witness to the truths for which Islam stands and to confront through intellectual dialogue and discourse the errors which parade as norms today. In this task they share much with Jews, Christians and other religious groups with all of whom Muslims have the duty to have a rapport of mutual respect and friendship as promulgated by the teachings of the Qur’ \llcorner and *Aadith* concerning the relation of Muslims to the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kit \llcorner b*) which from the Islamic point of view means in its most universal sense those who accept the Oneness of the Divine Principle and follow a religion revealed by the One. Needless to say, Islamic teachings also emphasize that Muslims must exercise the same respect vis-à-vis religious communities living as minorities among them as they are expected to exercise vis-à-vis religions among whose followers they live themselves as minorities



As summary and in conclusion it can be said that when one looks upon the horizon into the coming century and millennium of the Christian calendar and ponders upon Islam as a religion and way of life, one is lead to make the following observations: The faith (*âman*) of the vast majority of Muslims is bound to continue in strength if not always in depth and the tradition on both its external and inward dimensions as Law and Way, will remain a living reality. The intellectual and spiritual traditions of Islam, whose expressions have been renewed and whose activities have been revived in the latter half of this century now coming to an end are also bound to continue their process of rejuvenation and revival especially among modern educated

Muslims while they will be of ever greater attraction to non-Muslims in quest of wisdom and means for its attainment. Likewise, the process of the revival of traditional Islamic art is bound to continue even in face of the onslaught of secularist art and culture in the Islamic world. Moreover, the spread of Islam globally, and especially in America, seems most likely to continue while the newly established Islamic communities in the West continue to struggle in order to establish themselves while guarding their authenticity and sinking their roots in the new soil and land in which they have been planted.

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

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

On the social plane the trends of the past few decades including increasing urbanism and the pressure to break down the traditional family structures coming from various forms of feminism and various stresses of

the modern style of living, are bound to continue although in these domains more Islamic responses are likely. In the late 20th century most feminists in the Islamic world were from the modernized classes and not especially noted for their religious devotion. Most likely the trend toward an “Islamic form of feminism”, if such a term is still appropriate to use, will become more strengthened as will the greater participation of fully practising and pious Muslim women in social and economic activities outside the home as one can see even in a country such as Iran where a political revolution in the name of Islam has already occurred. Likewise, the new urban classes, coming from more pious layers of Islamic society than the older upper classes in urban areas are bound to strengthen rather than weaken the Islamic presence in cities despite the uprooting which urban growth at the expense of the countryside implies.

In the domain of economics and politics it is difficult to see how in the foreseeable future a completely stable situation can be created. In the economic field, Islamic ideals and practices have to contend with a much more powerful so-called global economic order and must remain content with creating islands here and there where Islamic economic theories can be put to practice and also with seeking to preserve as much as possible what remains of traditional Islamic economic practices in the bazaars as well as the countryside. There is no doubt, however, that many Muslims, even those living in the West, will seek to relate economics to ethics and will refuse to allow economics to be ever considered in principle as a legitimate field independent of ethical and hence religious concerns.

As for the political situation, the tensions and turmoils of the past decades and in fact since the colonial period are bound to continue as long as the Islamic world is not really independent. On the one hand areas still under foreign rule and annexed by colonial expansion during the past few centuries, ranging from certain parts of the Balkans to the northern Caucasus, to Palestine, to Kashmir, to Western China, which until the 19th century was Eastern Turkistan, to the southern Philippines are bound to be witness to continuous tension and strife until political problems are solved on the basis of sovereignty of the will of the people living in these lands. On the other hand within the main areas of the Islamic world contention between traditional, so-called fundamentalist and modernized or secularist groups are bound to continue and are most likely to spread. The question of the meaning of an Islamic state, Islamic democracy, the rule of God’s religion *vis-*

à-vis the rule of the people, the meaning and role of secularism, the relation between religion and the state, the unity of the Islamic world versus local national authority and many other central issues are bound to be continuously debated leading from time to time to external conflict as a result of constraints within Islamic societies as well as pressures exerted upon the Islamic world from the outside.

As far as religion in its most central sense is concerned, the most important challenges to Islam are bound to continue to be on the one hand that of secularism in all its forms including philosophical scepticism and scientific naturalism and materialism (despite the loss of the significance of the term matter in modern physics) and on the other the diversity of religions or religious pluralism. As the Islamic world plunges into civilizational dialogue and religious discourse with other religions on a more public scale, many of the most important new chapters in Islamic thought will probably be devoted to the subject of the unity and diversity of religions and all the issues ranging from the metaphysical to the ethical that are involved in this all important issue. This inter-religious discourse is also likely to be complemented by a greater intensity of dialogue among various schools within Islam itself, especially Sunnism and Shi'ism, and movements to create greater accord between these major interpretations of Islam during the past few decades are bound to continue and grow in strength in the future.

These and other issues and factors are likely to continue to push forth new manifestations and flowerings of Sufism, its spiritual teachings (along with other aspects of Islamic esoteric teachings as contained in Shi'ism), its philosophy so pertinent to the understanding of religious diversity, and its art and literature. As already mentioned, while during the past century both so-called fundamentalists and modernists in the Islamic world opposed Sufism, during the past few decades a new wave of interest in Sufism has been observable in many Islamic countries while in the West it has been primarily through Sufism that Westerners have come to gain a grasp of the deeper meaning of Islam. While opposition to Sufism is bound to continue in certain circles, its spread both within and outside the Islamic world is also most likely to continue and even accelerate. The incredible interest in America in the poetry of one of the greatest masters of Sufism, Jalâl al-Dân Rëmâ, even if it be an Americanised version of Rëmâ, is not a passing fad but most likely a sign of the ever more extensive influence of Sufism and its teachings in the West where it provides a path towards perfection for those

qualified to follow it and also the means for recollection of much that has been lost for those Christians and Jews seeking to re-discover the deeper dimensions of their own tradition. Within the Islamic world itself, Sufism and other philosophies issuing from the esoteric dimension of the Islamic revelation such as Shâ'ite gnosis (*'irfân-i shâ'â*) are alone capable of providing answers to many of the philosophical challenges of modernism as well as the challenge of taking into serious consideration the presence of other forms of the Sacred. This source is therefore bound to be tapped to an ever greater degree in future years as Muslims grapple more seriously with questions of the presence of two "others", one the secular which denies the validity of all religious views and the second, religious views of reality other than the Islamic.

Having said all of this, it is necessary to remember, however, the principle so emphasized in Islam that God alone knows the future. All human extrapolations in fact shall fall short with the smallest unforeseen perturbation. The so-called predictions of futurologists are there to bear witness to this assertion. All the projections made here are therefore made with the utmost humility and with full awareness of the fragility of human existence and the possibility of unforeseen factors, which can burst at any moment upon the scene in completely unpredictable ways. This is particularly true of our age in which signs of the latter days predicted by the Prophet and the saints of Islam are manifest everywhere, an age which seems so pregnant with momentous events beyond our ken. But even such projections cannot be made categorically, if one remembers the saying of the Prophet that all those who predict the Hour are liars. Even if we know that it is the eleventh hour, according to Islam only God knows when the clock will strike twelve o'clock.

All that one can say is that Islam is likely to remain a powerful religious force in the coming future, a challenge to secularism in all its forms as secularism will remain a challenge to it. Islam is bound to struggle with forces which negate its reality within and without and is most likely to draw ever closer to other religions, especially its monotheistic sisters, Judaism and Christianity, but even beyond them to all religions which share with it acceptance of the Transcendent, the sense of the sacred and understanding of the ultimately spiritual nature of man as well as the spiritual significance of all of creation. As to how exactly the forces of religion and secularism will contend with each other on the stage of cosmic history and how Islam will

create better understanding and bring about mutual understanding with other religions in the future while preserving its integrity, one can only repeat the formula with which traditional Islamic treatises usually conclude, that is, “And God knows best.” *wa’ Lahu a’lam.*

