

‘WITH ALL THY MIND’

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It could be said that one of the criteria of orthodoxy in a religion is that it should provide adequate means for the fulfilment of the following commandment in all its aspects: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind, and with all thy strength.”¹

The most essential part of the commandment is clearly its opening. The heart is the organ of faith, whose higher possibilities are certainty, intellection, gnosis. It is called ‘heart’ because it is as central and vital to the soul as the physical heart is to the body. The function of a centre is always that of attraction and radiation, on the one hand to draw towards it the outlying parts and to keep them knitted together as an integral whole, and on the other to transmit to them, according to the measure and the mode of their varying capacities, what it receives from worlds which lie above and beyond it. To ‘love with all thy heart’ means total love. Mind and soul, which depend ultimately on the heart for love of God, needed separate mention in the commandment only because their domination by the centre was reduced at the Fall to being no more than a virtuality, and because on the path of return to the primordial state of loving ‘with all thy heart’, mind-love and soul-love have a function of cause— or so it seems— in the process of re-awakening heart-love, though they could never be fully realized except as a result of that re-awakening. The give and the take in question correspond to the interaction of human initiative and Divine Grace. However much the manner of expression may vary, religions are in agreement that a minimum of effort from mind or soul in the direction of the heart, that is, the

¹ St. Mark, XII, 30. In Deuteronomy VI, 5, to which this is a reference, the element ‘mind’ is not mentioned, which makes no fundamental difference since the mind is strictly speaking a psychic faculty, and is therefore implicit in the word ‘soul’. In St. Matthew, XXII, 37, on the other hand, the element ‘strength’ is absent which again makes no difference inasmuch as physical energy and endurance are dominated by the will, which is also a psychic faculty.

Transcendent, is guaranteed to call down upon itself a vivifying and growth-promoting force out of all proportion to the gesture that released it. But that human gesture needs to be continually repeated.

Loss of direct contact with the heart meant loss of that inward attraction which alone could counterbalance the centrifugal tendencies of the other faculties. Left to their own resources, they were bound to move further and further from the centre and therefore from each other. This process of disintegration, although checked and even partially reversed for brief periods by repeated Divine interventions throughout the course of time, is inevitably now near to reaching its extremities, inasmuch as all traditions agree that we are approaching the end of this temporal cycle; and one of the most striking features of the general disintegration characteristic of modern man is an unparalleled mental independence by reason of which many minds are feverishly active and almost ‘acrobatically’ nimble. The same lack of anchorage makes also for an abnormally hurried superficiality of judgement and conclusion.

It is this mental independence which makes so timely and so necessary the chapter on ‘Understanding and Believing’ in Frithjof Schuon’s *Logic and Transcendence*.² The author focuses our attention on the monstrous yet now not uncommon phenomenon of understanding metaphysical truths in the mind without any assent of belief from the soul, let alone the heart. The only remedy is re-integration, since only if the different faculties are knit closer together can the soul be brought within near enough reach of the mind to respond to the light of the doctrine, which is addressed to the mind directly. But mental understanding followed by re-integration are as a second and third stage in the path of return. In the present context we are concerned with the preliminary stage of removing obstacles which make it difficult or impossible for the mind to understand. Intelligence has its rights, and these have not always been upheld by the representatives of religion. The mental faculties need to be appeased and re-assured ; and to this end religion has no option but to sacrifice certain half-truths, not to speak of mere suppositions and conjectures, which in the past were considered as powerful motives for loving God ‘with all thy soul and with all thy strength.’

² Ch. XII (Harper and Row, 1975).

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.³ 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. The lack of any such acknowledgment did not cause minds to falter in their worship, because each traditional civilization lived for the most part in high-walled isolation from other sectors of humanity. Moreover, there is nothing questionable in the general notion that certain religions are defunct and have been superseded by Divine intervention. Nor can it be doubted that pseudo-religion is a possibility, since the scriptures themselves speak of false prophets. A mediaeval Christian, for example, was therefore not mentally compromised because he classed Judaism as a superseded religion or because he classed Islam as a pseudo-religion. Everyone has a right to be ignorant or mistaken about what takes place in worlds other than his own.

But in the present age the isolating walls have for the most part been broken down. Otherwise expressed, the lifeboats are mostly within reach of each other, and life lines even cross; and minds are inevitably troubled by thoughts which would never have assailed them in the past. In a word, it becomes difficult to dedicate the mind to the worship of God when religious authorities make claims which the intelligence sees to be in direct contradiction with what religion teaches about the nature of God.

It may be objected that if the present situation is new, globally speaking, it none the less existed in the past, if only for relatively small minorities who lived at the frontiers which separated one theocratic civilization from another. For the last thirteen hundred years and more, Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in the Near East, with ample opportunities

³ As Frithjof Schuon has remarked, 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

for seeing that ‘the other religion’ is, in fact, just as genuine as their own. But until recent times the vast majority, including intellectuals, were none the less able, in all peace of mind, to live out their lives in the conviction that their religion alone was truly valid. Why should not the same exclusivism still be compatible with mental serenity?

The answer is partly that the frontiers which separate one perspective from another are not merely geographical. In a theocratic civilization, men are perpetually surrounded by reminders of God and the Beyond; and this produces an ‘inwardness’ which is both individual and collective, and which is itself a kind of isolating wall.⁴ The destruction of such walls is an evil; but the virtues they helped to maintain are indispensable and must be supported by other means. The following quotation, though it goes far beyond the context of what we are considering here, is none the less extremely relevant to the question of ‘half-truths’ as obstacles to mental co-operation in piety.⁵

The usual religious arguments, through not probing sufficiently to the depth of things and moreover not having previously had any need to do so, are psychologically somewhat outworn and fail to satisfy certain requirements of causality. If human societies degenerate on the one hand with the passage of time, they accumulate on the other hand experiences in virtue of old age, however intermingled with errors these may be. This paradox is something that any pastoral teaching intended to be effective should take into account, not by drawing new directives from the general error, but on the contrary by using arguments of a higher order, intellectual rather than sentimental.

⁴ ‘Aloof’ and ‘introspective’ are the epithets applied by Kenneth Cragg to the Eastern Churches, whom he severely criticizes in *The Call of the Minaret* for having done practically nothing throughout the centuries to convert the Islamic East to Christianity. It does not seem to occur to him that the qualities in question, though inconvenient for missionaries, are nearer to virtue than to vice. Moreover, the ‘aloofness’ may well be in part a subconscious unwillingness to ‘rush in where angels fear to tread’.

⁵ Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, London, 1976; repr. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000, p. 53.

Mental dilemma is a more or less inevitable consequence of seeking to maintain, in the modern world, all the details of the average religious perspective which characterized one's pious ancestors. A striking example of this is to be seen in an article on Jesus which a Jewish Rabbi was recently invited to write in one of our leading newspapers, the purpose of the invitation being to have an opinion which was representative of orthodox Jewry as a whole. The Rabbi's exposition is based on the question: What prompted Jesus to claim that he was the Messiah? A Jew, he maintains, is well qualified to answer this question in virtue of his special knowledge of the history of his own people, from which he knows that expectations of the Messiah had never been so strong as they were at that particular time. There was a kind of collective wishful thinking in the air which made it almost inevitable that someone would persuade himself and others that he was, in fact, the Lord's Anointed. The Rabbi goes on to speak appreciatively of Jesus as a man, acknowledges his excellent human qualities, emphasizes his good intentions, and excuses him for his messianic claims.

As a purely psychological explanation of how the Christian religion came into existence, this article opens up the way for someone else to demolish Judaism by exactly the same type of argument. Another point to be noticed is that the author, so it seems, does not dare to think beyond early first century Palestine either in time or in space. He speaks almost as if the crucifixion had only just been perpetrated, closing forever, as it must then have seemed to not a few, one of many chapters in the chronicle of false messianic claims. But what of world history in the last two thousand years? What of the fact that this 'false messiah' has taken possession, spiritually speaking, of three continents and half possession of a fourth, while making considerable inroads into the fifth? And what of the God who has allowed this wide-spread, long-lasting, deep-rooted deception to take place?

In other words, a would-be demonstration of the falsity of another religion proves to be a boomerang which comes back to strike at the very heart of one's own religion. For God is the heart of every religion; and a god who would allow deception on such a colossal scale would not be worth worshipping, even by the 'chosen people whom he had protected against that deception.'

On such a basis, belief can only be kept up by not following certain trains of thought which demand to be followed, and by refusing to draw certain obvious conclusions— in fact by no longer being equipped ‘with all thy mind’, let alone loving God. Such belief is exceedingly precarious; and even if the believer in question can live out his own life in orthodoxy to the end, he has little means of fortifying others, and he is in perpetual danger of finding any day that his sons and his daughters have lapsed into agnosticism or atheism. The anti-spiritual pressures of the modern world being what they are— and this applies especially to modern education— the scales are heavily weighted against finding the only true solution, namely a more universal spiritual perspective, which means moving nearer to the Spirit and therefore ‘upstream’ and ‘against the current’. On the other hand, the false solution of agnosticism is simply the next easy step down from misgivings about religion that are based on rationalism and pseudo-logic.

It seems to the Jew that to admit the Messianic claims of Jesus would amount to admitting that Judaism has been superseded— and Christians are waiting at the door to tell him that this is indeed the case. He wrongly imagines himself to be faced, practically speaking, with a choice between Judaism and Christianity. But it would be possible— and this is certainly a solution which some orthodox Jews have individually⁶ found for themselves— at least to reserve judgement about Jesus, or even to accept in his first coming a foretaste of the final and all-fulfilling Messianic advent, while continuing to cling to the God-given certainties of the Pentateuch and the Psalms. For Jews who were not swept into Christianity on the crest of its initial wave, the fact that the Messianic mission has not yet been altogether fulfilled can be taken as a sign that Judaism has not yet been superseded and as a justification for remaining faithful to the religion of Moses.

It is relatively easy for the Jew to go half way towards the perspective of *religio perennis* simply by reserving judgement about other religions. Since Judaism is not a world religion he can, with a clear conscience, leave other sectors of humanity to Providence in the certainty that It will take care of them. The Christian on the other hand feels himself to be the chosen

⁶ For the ideal collective attitude of Judaism to Christianity, and for the reasons why it could never be realized, see Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, p. 58.

instrument of Providence in this respect, as indeed he is, but within limits. The Church's refusal to see these limits results in a perspective which, in the modern world, runs dangerously close to the precipice of disbelief.

It is now some years since the already mentioned book *The Call of the Minaret* was published, and there is reason to think that the views of its author have moved since that time in a more universal direction. It is none the less a faithful mirror of the dilemma which faces many Christians, in particular clergymen and more especially missionaries, who come into close contact with Islam, and who cannot help being deeply impressed by its strength and its fullness as a religion. It is impossible for them to persist in calling Muhammad a 'false prophet'. On the other hand they will not, or as the case may be, dare not, give up their claim that the Passion of Jesus is the sole means of man's redemption. The point of the book's title is that the muezzin's call should be for Christians as a summons to duty, 'the duty of restoring to Muslims the Christ that they have missed.' The author adds: 'The Christ Jesus of the historic faith is an unescapable figure. It is He we must present to the world of Islam ... yet how we are to do this remains a problem and a burden!' These last words are an understatement. It is almost impossible to make adult Muslims accept the Christian doctrine of redemption, for they already have a full doctrine of Divine Grace and Mercy in another form, and the historic Jesus plays no part in it, although he remains a most benevolent and glorious onlooker. The Qur'an calls him the Word of God and a Spirit from God; and Muhammad testified to his second coming. In the days of the Caliphate, one of the traditional ways of wishing long life to a Caliph was to say to him: May you live long enough to give your government into the hands of Jesus, the son of Mary— Peace be on them both! But it would be impossible to introduce Jesus into the inner structure of Islam, for the building is already complete and perfect. Providence has not been waiting nearly fourteen hundred years for some Christian missionary to lay the foundation stone.

The author in question seems to have certain suspicions along these lines, and sparks of exasperation— or something akin to that— fly out from time to time: 'Islam has proved in history the supreme displacer of the faith of Christ', and 'The rise of Islam will always be a painful puzzle to the Christian mind.' But although he speaks of 'transcending difficulties', there is nothing

really transcendent in the book from beginning to end, and that is its weakness. On such a basis, there can clearly be no question of 'loving with all thy mind'.

The same criticisms cannot be made of *A New Threshold*⁷ by the Bishop of Guildford, because there is at least one remarkable outlet onto universality in a timely quotation from St. Justin Martyr's *Apology*, where the uniqueness of Christ as Redeemer is expounded at the level of the Logos and not allowed to trespass upon lower domains which are subject to multiplicity. From this point of view, the act of Redemption belongs to the Divine Nature of Jesus, not to his human nature, and since it thus transcends time and space, it cannot be limited to any historical event. 'We have been taught that Christ is the First begotten of God, and have testified that he is the Intellect (*logos*) of which every race of man partakes. Those who lived in accordance with intellect are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them . . . Those who lived by Intellect, and those who so live now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed'.⁸

In recalling St. Justin's standpoint as a legitimate one for Christians to take with regard to adherents of other religions, the Bishop of Guildford thereby implicitly assents to its unescapable corollary that the act of Redemption operates in other modes as well as in the specifically Christian mode of the Passion. The contrary claim, that in a world subject to multiplicity the Divine Mercy, by definition Infinite, should be limited to one single effective act is in principle something that a metaphysician cannot readily accept, quite apart from the overwhelming factual evidence against it. Admittedly the majority cannot be sacrificed to a minority; but certain claims which may have 'worked' in the past are of an increasingly dubious value for the majority while being lethal to the intellectual minority. There are Christians for whom the *Bhagavat Gita* comes next to the Gospels and the Psalms as their most reverend book; and this Hindu scripture bears a most eloquent and

⁷ This booklet, with the subtitle, 'Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim Communities' has recently been published to coincide with the World of Islam Festival.

⁸ *First Apology*, Section 46. For the word 'Reason, as translation of *logos*, we have substituted 'Intellect'.

irrefutable witness to a redeeming Divine Incarnation other than Jesus in the person of Krishna and, by extension, of other Hindu Avataras, including the Buddha. As Frithjof Schuon remarks:⁹

Every exoteric doctrine is in fact characterized by a disproportion between its dogmatic demands and its dialectical guarantees; for its demands are absolute as deriving from the Divine Will and therefore also from Divine Knowledge, whereas its guarantees are relative, because they are independent of this Will and based, not on Divine Knowledge, but on a human point of view, that of reason and sentiment. For instance, Brahmins are invited by Christian missionaries to abandon completely a religion that has lasted for several thousand of years, one that has provided the spiritual support of innumerable generations and has produced flowers of wisdom and holiness down to our times. The arguments that are produced to justify this extraordinary demand are in no wise logically conclusive, nor do they bear any proportion to the magnitude of the demand; the reasons that the Brahmins have for remaining faithful to their spiritual patrimony are therefore infinitely stronger than the reasons by which it is sought to persuade them to cease being what they are. The disproportion, from the Hindu point of view, between the immense reality of the Brahmanic tradition and the insufficiency of the religious counter arguments is such as to prove quite sufficiently that had God wished to submit the world to one religion only, the arguments put forward on behalf of this religion would not be so feeble, nor those of certain so-called ‘infidels’ so powerful; in other words,

⁹ *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Harper and Row, 1975), p. 14. The title ‘With All Thy Mind’ makes the many references to Frithjof Schuon inevitable because his writings lead the way in giving the mind its due in respect of religion. Not that they are limited to the mind, any more than the mind, in the context of ‘with all thy mind’, can be limited to itself, since to be fully operative its higher reaches depend directly on the heart. It is to the mind, to the intermediary intellectual faculties, and to the heart that Frithjof Schuon’s writings are above all addressed— a domain covered by the words *Logic and Transcendence* which might serve in a sense as a title for most of his books as they do in fact for one. To avoid giving a false impression, however, it must be added, as regards the soul, that while demolishing certain outworn human arguments which have in the past served the cause of ‘with all thy soul’, he puts other arguments of a higher order in their place. Few writers, if any, have so clearly demonstrated the importance of sacred art in this respect. And who in recent centuries has written so profoundly and unmoralistically about the necessity of virtue?

if God were on the side of one religious form only, the arguments put forward on behalf of this religion would be such that no man of good faith would be able to resist it’.

To this passage, written for Christians in affirmation of the validity of Hinduism, let us add the following in affirmation of Islam:¹⁰

.....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 PossibilityIf 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.

To consider now 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 thee¹¹ About some of them have We told thee, and about some have We not told thee.¹²

We may quote also:

Verily the Faithful¹³ and the Jews and the Sabians¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 20.

¹¹ Muhammad.

¹² Qur’an, XL, 78.

There is a place for both Judaism and Christianity within the Islamic civilization, and Muslims are obliged to protect the synagogues and churches and other Jewish and Christian sanctuaries. It was a calamity for Spanish Jews when the Christians reconquered Spain.

It has to be admitted, however, that the authorities of Islam have been no less ready than their counterparts in other religions to risk ‘with all thy mind’ for the sake of ‘With all thy soul and with all thy strength’. 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 truly valid religion on earth. But however absolute the claims of Muslim theologians and jurists may be, they are shown in fact to be relative by the tolerance which Islam makes obligatory towards Judaism and Christianity. Taken with that ‘grain of salt’— though few are fully conscious of it— the claims in question are not necessarily unpalatable to the intelligence, and are not bound to prevent an intellectual from loving God with all his mind, provided he remain within the walls of the Islamic civilization, which stop him from seeing the full implications of this exclusivism.

But once outside these walls, the situation is different. The most that a sound intelligence can accept are the claims which naturally result from the fact that Islam represents the most recent Divine intervention upon earth. But these claims, though considerable, are relative, not absolute¹⁶ and a Muslim intellectual in the modern world will not find peace of mind except by assenting to this. It should not however be difficult for him to do so, for a glance at those passages of the Qur’an on which the theologians’ exclusivism is based shows that the verses in question call for a deeper and more universal interpretation than is generally given.

¹³ Muslims.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ V, 69.

¹⁶ An orthodox Jew, for example, deeply in love with the Hebrew Psalms, would be justified in hesitating to give up his religion for one that was based on a Revelation in a language he did not know; and he could use Quranic argument to justify himself.

One of these passages is the following:

*He it is who hath sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of Truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion, though the idolaters be averse.*¹⁷

This verse can be given a narrower or a wider interpretation. Its more immediate meaning is clearly the narrower one: the *messenger* is Muhammad, *the religion of Truth* is the Quranic message and the *idolaters* are the pagan Arabs, Persians, Berbers, and certain other pagans. But what of the words *that He may make it prevail over all religion*? It is here that the crux of the matter may be said to lie.

Whatever the disadvantages of modern education, it serves to implant a more global concept of world history and geography than is normally held by members of traditional civilisations which tend, as we have seen, to be ‘aloof’ and ‘introspective’. The wider knowledge is a mixed blessing, but where it exists it must be taken into account. An intelligent Muslim, living in the modern world, is bound to realize sooner or later, suddenly or gradually, not only that the Quranic message has not been made to *prevail over all religion*, but also that Providence itself is directly responsible for the ‘short-coming’. The shock of this realization may shatter his belief, unless he be enabled to understand that the verse in question has a wider significance. In the narrower sense, *all religion* can only be taken to mean ‘all religion in your part of the world’. But if *all religion* be interpreted in an absolute sense, and if *idolaters* be made to include such people as the Germans and Celts, many of whom were still pagan at the outset of Islam, then *the religion of Truth* must also be given its widest application, and the words ‘once again’ must be understood. (i. e. He it is who hath sent once again His messenger . . .), for the Divinity has sent messengers before, and never with anything other than *the religion of Truth*. These last four words, like the term Islam itself, can be taken in a universal sense, to include all true religion. The Qur’an makes it clear that the religions of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus may be called ‘Islam! in its literal meaning of ‘submission to God’. In this sense Islam

¹⁷ IX, 33.

may be said to have been made to *prevail over all religion*.¹⁸ But in its narrower sense Islam has only been allowed to *prevail over all religion* in a limited part of the world. It is now fourteen hundred years since the revelation of the Qur'an and Providence has allowed non-Quranic modes of *the religion of Truth* to remain as barriers to the Quranic message in more than half the globe.

In the same context, verses affirming that Muhammad has been sent *for all people*¹⁹ have to be understood in a less monopolizing way than they have been throughout the centuries by Muslims with little or no general knowledge about other religions and their distribution. What the Qur'an tells us here is that Islam, unlike Judaism or Hinduism, is a world religion. But it is not denying that Buddhism and Christianity are also world religions, that is, open to everybody, at least in principle. These last words are important, for God *doth what He will*,²⁰ and our only means of knowing His Will in this respect are by the results.²¹ With regard to the world as it has been in its geographical distribution of peoples for the last two thousand years, it will not escape the notice of an observant Muslim any more than an observant Christian that there is, spatially speaking, a certain sector in which Providence has worked wonders for Buddhism and done relatively little for either Christianity or Islam. The same Muslim will also notice that there is another sector in which Providence has worked wonders for Christianity and done very little for the other world religions; and the fact that between these two sectors there is a third in which Islam has been favoured beyond all other religions will not be enough to exonerate him from changing his perspective. For if, as he had been led to believe, God had truly wished Islam (in the

¹⁸ The verse we are considering is parallel to the words of Christ, 'This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world. Then shall the end come,' which likewise admit of both a limited and a universal interpretation, according to what is understood by 'world'. In its wider sense (as well as the narrower one) the first part of this prophecy has now come true inasmuch as every people on earth is now within easy reach of the gospel of the Kingdom, that is, the religion of Truth, in at least one of its modes.

¹⁹ XXXIV, 28.

²⁰ II, 253.

²¹ That is, the great and lasting results which have been put to the test by centuries of time.

narrower sense) to spread over the whole world, why did He construct such impregnable barriers to it in so vast an area?²²

To take the nearest example, Providence was putting an end to paganism in England at the very time when the Qur'an was being revealed. *The religion of Truth*, in its Christian mode, was being made to *prevail over all religion*, although the idolaters were averse; and since a Divine intervention is never mediocre, Christianity was being established on the firmest foundations, so that not even the Quranic message, at the height of the power of the Islamic civilization, could come near to prevailing against it. And yet it would have been easy for Providence to have waited a few years and converted England to the new religion instead of setting up there such a resistance to it. The answer to the 'problem', if anyone considers it to require an answer, lies in the following verse, which many consider to be among the last Revelations received by the Prophet and which in any case 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'²³ for a direct message to be sent from Heaven to earth during what remains of this cycle of time. Many of the last Quranic revelations are concerned with completing and perfecting the

²² The answer of some Muslim theologians to this question has been, in all seriousness, that Almighty God has evidently decided to send the larger part of humanity astray, and that it is not for us to question His Wisdom. But faith on this basis can never be more than fragmentary. By such logic the mind surreptitiously robs itself of love, while turning a blind eye to some of the most essential Attributes of the Object of love. Another 'explanation', shared also by Christians, *mutatis mutandis*, is that the 'religion of Truth' (understood in a non-universal sense) will in fact finally prevail over the whole world. *Veritas omnia vincit*. But if only one religion had been valid in the eyes of Heaven for the last thousand years or more, the expectation of a sudden total triumph of that true religion at the end of the cycle could not be enough to appease the mind, that is, it could not convincingly 'exonerate' Providence from having allowed false religion to triumph so far and wide for so long.

²³ *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.

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 God²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

²⁴ The change from first to third person with regard to the Divinity is frequent in the Qur'an.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ V, 48.