

MUSLIM MODERNISM, IQBAL, AND
DEMYTHOLOGIZATION: A
PERENNIALIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Islam and modern Western thought are two separate epistemic and cognitive universes that run parallel to each other and any attempt to appropriate former in terms of later necessitates some sort of demythologization and that amounts to relinquishing religious thesis in its authentic traditional format. Iqbal's approach to Islam is dictated by his perception that modern science and some of its fundamental methodological and philosophical assumptions need to be appropriated in traditional Islam and if need be to reconstruct traditional religious thought. His rereading of traditional theological thought from the perspective of his own philosophy of ego conceived in the background of traditional Islamic metaphysical and Sufi perspective could be read as an exercise in demythologization. His theological modernism and plea for reconstruction necessitating his attempt at demythologizing and allegorizing the Quran is unique and unprecedented approach in Islamic history. His modernist reading of Islam, inspired primarily by his appropriation of modern science and its philosophy, explicated in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, is here critiqued especially as it informs this endeavour of demythologization.

Rudolf Bultman (1884-1976) to whom demythologization owes its origin and vogue, declared that modern man can't think in mythological terms employed in the New Testament¹ or we could say the Quran. Indeed his claim was in a way right if one grants the veracity of modern scientific outlook. Metanarrative of modern science can't allow knowledge and existence claims of traditional religions as Freud declared in his famous *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*. Dawkins in more recent times has popularized the same claim. Indeed modern man's commitment to naturalistic reductionist scientism is incompatible with traditional premodern super-naturalist transcendent mythological (myth being more real than the facts of with which science deals for the traditional man) framework. Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God is dramatic statement of the same point. All reference to vertical causes and transcendence must go if one is loyal to modernistic-reductionistic-naturalistic-evolutionistic-demythologizing enterprise. Bultman regards myth as the explanatory pseudo-science of a primitive, pre-scientific view of the world. The cosmology of the New Testament (and this will apply to the Quran as well) is essentially mythical in character. For him mythological elements in the of Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) worldview include among others the three layered universe, with earth in the centre, the heavens above, and the underworld, miracles, ascension to heaven, demonology, the other world, appeal to intervention of God etc. What he proposes is not the elimination of myth (although that would amount to the same from strict the traditionalist perspective) but its reinterpretation in existential terms. The inner meaning of the myths must be explicated in existentialist terms and purged of the objectifications that they contain. According to him we can't believe in objective cognitive propositional character of traditional myths. Since modern worldview denies hierarchy of existence and limits Reality to the world experienced by senses and removes the concept of 'reality' as a category pertaining to God, it can't but be compelled to take recourse to some sort of demythologization that appropriates traditional supernatural hierarchic transcendent claims in evolutionist naturalistic existentialistic framework. One could not object to existentialistic appropriation if one grants traditional hierarchical vision of existence but demythologizers don't grant that. Logical sequel of Bultman's view is complete emptying of religious content

of the myths as his follower Fritz Buri has argued. As Buri says, Bultman's stance is insufficiently radical and one can't maintain his distinction between the *kerygma* (the essential proclamations of early church) and myths and desire to retain the former but not the latter.² Authentic existentialism according to him isn't Christian (or religious) distinctively. Bultman's underlying assumption is that existential or self involving language can operate effectively if it is disengaged from other language that conveys cognitive truth. Modern evolutionism and reductionism can't allow vertical causality and thus it severs all ties with transcendence.

Modern science or modern thought in general, has created contemporary modern age which is appropriately referred to as the Age of Science. Modern age defines itself with respect to theory and practice of modern science. Modern consciousness or sensibility is primarily moulded or conditioned by modern knowledge which is the province of modern science. Modern man is incapable of reliving the alien traditional universe, as a vital process. He has moved from the past traditional medieval *weltanschauung* to a modern one. He thinks that he has really evolved judging from his evolutionary worldview that means rejection of "leading strings of tradition" and moves confidently into future unhampered by the past. Modern man, who thinks that he can't unlearn the developments of knowledge in the last few centuries, has committed himself to the Enlightenment project. The post-Renaissance scientific worldview that created the modern western civilization prides itself on its achievements and can't relinquish them that have led to desecralized, a-religious or irreligious secularist age that is ours -- that sharply distinguishes itself from all traditional religious worldviews. They reject the whole project of modernity and the whole edifice of modern thought or modern science, its philosophy, methodology and its grand claim to stand as judge over religion or to clarify its message or expunge its so-called mythological superstructure. Iqbal, speaking for the modern man shares to a significant extent his basic predicament, his compulsions, his psychology and positivist empiricist rationalist spirit, his anthropocentrism and his humanism. His addressee is modern educated man -- Muslim or otherwise. He is himself a half-convert to modern project although he doesn't forget his traditional roots. Without being forgetful of modern sensibility he wants a space for Islam and tries to fit it in its mould. He approaches from the vantage point of modernity and modern science. He self confessedly sees through modern Western eyes. He takes modernity for granted, as given, as something that is here to stay and He takes it as the reference frame, almost

dogmatically. He is an apologist for modern age and its science. In his preface to *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought In Islam* he gives reasons for embarking on the project of reconstruction (that is not always neatly differentiable from the project of demythologization and in fact concedes some of its claims) of religious thought. He doesn't object to modern mind's inability to organically "assimilate on alien universe by reliving, as a vital process, that special type of inner experience on which religious faith ultimately rests."³ He accepts and even praises it and brings a Qur'anic warrant for it. Modern man's habit of concrete thought has rendered him less capable of that experience [mystical religious experience] which he further suspects because of its liability to "illusion."⁴ He criticizes the later day representatives of Sufism for ignoring the modern mind and for having become absolutely incapable of receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience.⁵ He deplors the absence of "a scientific form of religious knowledge" provided by methods that are physiologically less violent and psychologically more suitable to a concrete type of mind.⁶ Naturally he finds traditional Sufi techniques (and literature) as outdated or outmoded, suitable for medieval rather than modern psychological framework. He accordingly reconstructs "practically a dead metaphysics" of traditional Islam and attempts to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy in the light of "more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge."⁷ He is critical of the traditional Islamic metaphysics which he sees as a "worn out" and practically "a dead metaphysics" and its peculiar thought forms and set phraseology producing manifestly 'a deadening effect on the modern mind.'⁸ According to him it is our duty to watch the progress of human thought, as if it affects metaphysics and religion in some vital manner. As charted out in the preface, he proceeds in his first two lectures to evaluate religion from scientific empiricist viewpoint. He attempts to reconstruct religion accordingly, in the light of modern scientific thought rather than vice versa (i.e., critiquing or reconstruct modern science in the light of traditional Islam or Islamizing it).⁹

In the traditional worldview (expounded in the modern times in most comprehensive manner by the traditionalist perennialist school) God is Reality, the totality of Existence, both transcendent and immanent. God is *Muhit*, the Environment that surrounds us, in which we live move and have our being. This is what modernity would hardly understand. "Cut off from the twin sources of metaphysical knowledge, namely revelation and intellect, and also deprived of that inner spiritual experience which makes possible the concrete realization of higher levels of being, modern man has been

confined to such a truncated and limited aspect of reality that of necessity he has lost sight of God as Reality”¹⁰ as Nasr, the great spokesperson of traditionalist school, says. Nasr elaborates:

The fruit of several centuries of rationalistic thought in the West has been to reduce both the objective and the subjective poles of knowledge to a single level. In the same way that the *cogito* of Descartes is based on reducing the knowing subject to a single mode of awareness, the external world which this knowing self perceives is reduced to a spatiotemporal complex limited to a single level of reality - - no matter how far this complex is extended beyond the galaxies or into aeons of time, past and future.¹¹

The traditional view as expressed in the metaphysical teachings of both the Eastern and the Western traditions is based, on the contrary, upon a hierarchic vision of reality, not only of reality’s objective aspect but also of its subjective one.

Not only are there many levels of reality or existence stretching from the material plane to the Absolute and Infinite Reality which is God, but there are also many levels of subjective reality or consciousness, many envelops of the self, leading to the Ultimate Self, which is Infinite and Eternal and which is none other than the Transcendent and Immanent Realty both beyond and within... There is not just one form of perception or awareness. There are modes and degrees of awareness leading from the so called “normal” perception by man of both his own ego and the external world to awareness of Ultimate Selfhood, in which the subject and the object of knowledge become unified in a single Reality beyond all separation and distinction.¹²

One need not comment on the profound difference between traditional and modern outlook which inspires demythologization project. We will first briefly explicate modern science’s attitude towards this traditional picture, towards the knowledge and existence claims of traditional religion and metaphysics, to contextualize our critique of demythologization.

The orthodox scientific establishment is strongly resisting religious appropriation of science. It is usually agnostic if not atheistic in orientation. In the name of truth, facts and objectivity it has launched a crusade against “superstition” called religion. A leading authority (Julian Huxley) has vetoed against religious explanation of the world by saying that if events have natural causes, they don’t have supernatural causes. The naturalist framework of modern science to which it is committed by its very methodology can’t be but antagonistic towards religion’s existence claims. Richard Dawkins, famous evolutionary biologist who wrote *The Blind Watchmaker* rejecting fashionable “way of two compartments” thesis

i.e., positing separate domains for faith and science to avoid head on conflict between the two says, “It is completely unrealistic to claim, as Gould and many others do, that religion keeps itself away from science’s turf, restricting itself to morals and values Religions make existence claims and this means scientific claims”¹³ and thus as a scientist he must oppose religion tooth and nail but science only can make existence claims and religion’s existence claims conflict with it. He is echoing Freud in this connection. Freud in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* concludes with a statement of what he calls “scientific *Weltanschauung*” which represents more or less the official attitude of the Church of science. In essence, he thinks, “it asserts that there is no other source of knowledge of the universe but the intellectual manipulation of carefully verified observations, in fact, what is called research and that no knowledge can be obtained from revelation, intuition or inspiration.”¹⁴ Freud makes the drastic implications of this statement quite explicit. “It is inadmissible to declare,” he writes, “that science is one field of human intellectual activity and that religion and philosophy are other at least as valuable and that science has no business to interfere with the other two, that they all have an equal claim to truth and that everyone is free to choose whence he shall draw his convictions and in which he shall place his belief.” He goes on to declare in a tone reminiscent of some ecclesiastical authority that:

such an attitude is considered particularly respectable, tolerant, broad minded and free from narrow prejudice. Unfortunately, it is not tenable, it shares all the pernicious qualities of an entirely unscientific *weltanschauung* and in practice come to much the same thing. The basic fact is that truth can’t be tolerant and can’t admit compromise or limitations; that scientific research looks on the whole field of human activity as its own and must adopt an uncompromisingly critical attitude towards another power that seeks to usurp any part of its province.

Religion is incompatible with science according to Freud because it too makes truth claims and can’t surrender them. He asserts that science alone can correspond to reality and “it is this correspondences with the real external world we call truth.” He then goes on to assert that when religion claims that it can take the place of science and this because it is beneficent and ennobling, it must therefore be true, that claim is, in fact an encroachment, which, in the interests of everyone, should be resisted. Not only religion but also philosophy and what the perennialists call metaphysics, doesn’t seem to Freud to offer man a genuine alternative to scientific truth. Insofar as it parts company with science by clinging to the illusion that it can produce a complete and coherent picture of the universe, philosophy must be regarded as an impostor in the halls of

knowledge. The positivist philosophy of science has been so influential in the twentieth century in usurping the place of all philosophy. Thus even philosophical test of religious truth which Iqbal undertakes may be of no value to scientific *weltanschauung*. Only purely scientific tests aren't suspected by modern scientific age. Freud gives his verdict that philosophy any more than religion can't be a substitute of science. Both together fall under Freud's interdict. "Both together should be outcasts from human culture if what he calls "our best hope for the future" that is, the intellect -- the scientific spirit, reason should in time establish a dictatorship over the human mind." In the face of all this if one tries to appropriate modern scientific outlook in religious framework it would be at the cost of emptying it of almost all objective cognitive truth claims, of all "idea" in Iqbalian phrase and reduce it to some sort of feeling, some psychological state and denial of religion's attempt to build a metaphysics that Iqbal defends so passionately.¹⁵

All theological modernism is committed to demythologizing religion which is a typical modern heretic movement that takes modern project so seriously as to create religion in the latter's own image. This is another manifestation of idolatrous instinct that makes God in its own image or humanizes that which transcends merely human. There are religious as well as secularist demythologizations of religion although the orthodox character of the former is obviously suspect. Man lives by virtue of myths and not by the bread of facts alone. The sacrosanct character of myths was never challenged at such a mass scale until the culmination of modern project, until God was murdered by the collective action of modern man through the sword of modern science. In the post-Christian secular West, myths and legends that formed the life blood of traditional or medieval Christian civilization were no longer credible. The religious myths were replaced by secularist world view and religion too was forced to carve a niche for itself in secularist framework. The religion in an age where God was practically almost dead couldn't be traditional religion; rather the latter had to be demythologized or secularized. This is the background and the logic of modern movement for demythologization that threatened to destroy the traditional character of the Christian Western Civilization and did affect modern man's approach to religion. Many theologians succumbed to it and many of those who critiqued it were influenced to some extent by it. Modern rationalism, scientism and evolutionism were instrumental in creating this great heresy of demythologization.

Christian theology was ideally vulnerable to this rationalist, naturalistic, reductionist appropriation at the hands of secular

theologian and demythologizer. The twentieth century has been the century of Nietzsche who infamously declared that God is dead -- modern man has killed Him. Post-Christian post-Nietzschean theology is deeply coloured by this epoch-making event (Nietzsche captured the essence of (post)modern historical project in this claim). The post-Nietzschean theologies such as secular theology and postmodern a/theology are informed by this disappearance of the traditional God from Western consciousness. Rejection of hierarchy of existence and traditional sciences characterize modern world view. However the traditional myths and archetypes or the symbols through which man has traditionally appropriated the universe, can't be so easily thrown away. Man can't reinvent myths for himself. He can't disown his collective unconscious or archetypes. Religions descend from Heaven and aren't created in the minds of visionaries, poets and psychologists. Modern man can't write his own scripture as certain demythologizers would have us believe. Having emptied traditional religious mythology of all transcendental reference, he tried to build a secular mythology which, needless to say, miserably fails to substitute the former. It is fortunate that Islam has, by and large, escaped the fate of Christianity which took modern rationalistic, scientific Enlightenment project too seriously and accordingly appropriated tradition.

Demythologization, if carried out consistently and to its logical end, results in crude caricature of religion. Modern age is surrounded by an environment of "piety without content," as Susan Sontag has aptly characterized it. The religion-less religion, the logical result of demythologization, is anything but religion and this is precisely the charge of traditionalist orthodoxy against it. Modern man in his attempt to reformulate religion in the framework of perverted modernist thought has missed the most important thing about religion in the process and it is because of this danger that orthodoxy must take strong note of it. It is from this perspective (i.e., perennialist traditionalist perspective) that we will be approaching Muslim attempts at demythologization of the Quran, especially the Iqbalian attempt.

Modernism in religion or modernist approach to religion involves demythologization in one or the other form, to a little or greater degree. Iqbal's approach to Islam is more or less modernist and thus his attempt at demythologizing and allegorizing the Quran is quite in line with it. We will focus on him first and then make a few remarks on Sir Syed and Muhammad Abduh.

Iqbalian philosophy of ego appears to be demythologization of the traditional Islamic conceptions of Soul and Spirit. His

psychological approach to traditional idea of soul and his reduction of the latter to ego is subsumable under the general head of demythologization. Iqbalian appropriation of the spiritual in the psychical as demonstrated in his psychological approach to religion and mysticism may be seen as demythologization at work. Iqbal's naturalistic appropriation of the supernatural elements in traditional Islam in his *Reconstruction* (though not in his poetry), much in the manner of Sir Syed, is yet another mode of demythologization. His interpretation of the finality of prophethood seems to be informed by typical modernist demythologizing assumptions. The Prophet of Islam announced the birth of modern age that is characterized by rationalism, inductionism and empiricism. Thus mythological mode or myth creating intuitive consciousness has to be transcended. The advent of modernity means the retreat of primitive, ancient non-rational modes of thinking and this isn't to be lamented or regretted but welcomed. The institution of prophethood was abolished to pave way for the smooth takeover of the modern scientific and rationalist age. Man must be thrown back on his own resources which are reason and science which have, however, led to disenchanted world view that hardly admits of any transcendental reference. We must keep recent advances in all the departments of human thought in the background (or respectfully approach them) while interpreting scripture. Modern demythologization project is the logical implication of this approach that is too respectful towards modern scientific thought. Bultman's great project of demythologizing the Bible, Bonhauser's, Tillich's and Robinson's attempts to reconstruct traditional Christian thought in the light of post – Renaissance and Enlightenment project (that culminates in secular theological approach, which amounts to demythologization of the former) are dictated by the assumptions that man and his science have progressed, that positivism with its anti metaphysical bias-needs to be reckoned with, that every age should be allowed to develop its own theology (and write its own scripture to be up to date?) , that there is no such thing as orthodoxy and that man has come of age. Iqbal does share to some extent all these assumptions and his reconstructionist project is informed or conditioned by all of them.

We need to distinguish two different attitudes vis-à-vis demythologization. On the one hand we may say that the so-called myths and legends of religion refer to secular and worldly realities, but on the other hand we may affirm that these myths don't refer to worldly realities at all but to the transcendental realities which are given expression in terms with which we are familiar and which

represent the scientific and intellectual level of the period in which the revelation took place, as Syed Vahidudin notes.¹⁶ He rightly remarks about Sir Syed and Iqbal in this connection that their approach to “legends” and “myths” is conditioned by the former attitude. He says “ Syed Ahmad Khan and Iqbal no less, completely ignore their transcendental character and demythologize them in a way which if carried out consistently would strip revelation of all its contents.”¹⁷ The primarily metaphysical import of these so-called legends and myths is more or less absent in Iqbal’s reading (dictated by psycho-anthropological and evolutionist framework) of them. Syed Vahidudin rightly says, “Iqbal’s biologically oriented approach needs to be supplemented by the deeper metaphysical analysis of the key concepts of Islamic theology.”¹⁸ However, Iqbal’s demythologization, despite its heterodoxy, doesn’t go as far as those of the Christian demythologizers like Bultman, and such Muslim secular theologians as Niaz Fatehpuri. He isn’t even Sir Syed for that matter. His poetry reveals a very different Iqbal from the demythologizer Iqbal of *the Reconstruction*.

Our demythologizers are anxious to reduce religion to something which is comprehensible, logical, an object that can be appreciated by reason and psychology. They try to divest religion of all its mystery, the irrationality and “illogicality” so as to appeal to modern mind. But religion is precisely of the opposite character. To make religion a logical affair or the affair of the mind and compromise or omit Mystery, to translate its realm of the invisible (*Al Ghayb*) in terms of the phenomenal or the visible, to humanize or logicize the Transcendental Ground of our being, to give a scientific or rationalistic cloak to religion – all this is equivalent to its denial. A. N. Whitehead catches the paradoxical or suprarational or a-rational spirit of religion in his famous characterization of religion in these words:

as the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within , the passing flux of immediate things, something which is real and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility and yet the greatest of present facts; something which gives meaning to all that passes and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good and yet is beyond all reach, something which is the ultimate ideal and the hopeless quest.¹⁹

It is the hunger of the soul for the infinite, the unreachable, the ungraspable, the unknowable. It celebrates the mystery and the unknown. Indeed it grounds itself in the unknown. It is belief in the Unseen, as the Quran says (2:2). The anti-idolatrous deconstructionist spirit of all religion problematizes any representation or definition or objectivization of the object of

religion. The concept of negative Divine, so characteristic of eastern religions and mysticism shows this clearly. There is no way to know Him (or catch the infinite through reason as Iqbal would like us to believe) or to experience Him as his empiricist appropriation of religious or mystic “experience” would have us believe). He is the unknown, the unknowable, the *mysterium tremendum*. I quote Stace’s comments on Whitehead’s characterization of religion (quoted above) to show how problematic is the basic assumption of advocates of demythologization regarding comprehensible, logical or rational and this-worldly meaning of religion and their compromise on God’s essential transcendence. Stace says:

Did we not see that the words of Whitehead, must mean at least that contradiction and paradox lie at the heart of things? And is there any more contradiction here than we find – to give the most obvious example from traditional theology – in the doctrine of the Trinity? That, too, proclaims in unmistakable terms that there is contradiction in the Ultimate. The rationalizing intellect, of course, will not have it so. It will attempt to explain away the final Mystery, to logicize it, to reduce it to the categories of “this” and “that”. At least it will attempt to water it down till it looks something like “common sense” and can be swallowed without too much discomfort. But the great theologians knew better. In the self-contradictory doctrine of the Trinity they threw the Mystery of God uncompromisingly in men’s faces. All attempts to make religion a purely rational, logical thing are not only shallow but would, if they could succeed, destroy religion. Either God is a Mystery or He is nothing at all.²⁰

Tertullian’s famous remark *Credo ad absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) puts this position so succinctly. Religion is of the irrational, by the irrational and for the irrational, as Osho says.²¹ Mystic experience, on the basis of which Iqbal tries to justify religious claims, reveals an “object” that no demythologizing approach could appropriate. The essential nature or the essence of religion is not just beyond psychology but beyond philosophy, beyond the ken of reason. The most fundamental “proposition” of religion, as revealed in religious experience, is the mystery of God. Nothing can provide any insight into the veiled mystery of the ultimate object of religion. Mystics like Eckhart, Bohme, and the mystical philosophers like Bradley, Hegel and Spinoza amply demonstrate utter incapability of rational logical intellect to penetrate the mystery of the Absolute or Godhead, as Stace argues in his *Time and Eternity*. No science, no level of experience (Iqbal notes three main levels of experience unfolding in time – the level of matter, the level of life and the level of mind and consciousness – the subject matter of physics, biology and psychology respectively²² and thinks

that these reveal the character or behaviour of God) and nothing from the natural order could provide any real clue in this regard. The religious experience is ineffable and autonomous and this domain of Eternity or Heaven is unconnected with or transcends the realm of time, of this world. Iqbal focuses on what Stace calls the positive Divine (that could, in principle, be appropriated through demythologizing enterprise) and ignored the equally important aspect of the negative Divine that is revealed in prophetic-mystical experience. As the necessary counterpart of the positive characterization of the divine that well catches God's dimension of immanence in the universe, is the negative characterization of the divine that problematizes all our anthropocentric, anthropomorphic, rationalistic representations and constructions of God. The very *raison de'etre* or basis of demythologizing approach gets deconstructed. God is the utterly other. He can in no way be dragged to the human plane and thereby appropriated in the plane of immanence, of time, of logic or thought, of science or of knowledge as ordinarily understood. All mystics including the Sufis (whose experience of God is the fundamental thesis in Iqbalian empiricist approach to religion) have emphasized the negative divine, the nothingness of God. The Ultimate Reality is Non-being, Nothing, Emptiness, the Void, the Abyss, the great silence, the great darkness, "the wordless Godhead," "the nameless, formless nothing" (Tauler), "the wild waste" "the everlasting Nay" (Bohme), "the still wilderness" (Eckhart), the Beyond-Being, *Habūt* (Ipseity). God is wholly outside the natural order, wholly transcending the realm of temporality. Eternity can't be experienced in the usually accepted sense of the word experience. Only out of time do we experience Him. God can be known only through God, seen only through His eyes, as Ba Yazid says. Intuition or revelation is to be sharply distinguished from reason, despite Iqbal's attempt to prove that intuition is organically linked to the intellect. (The term intellect is here used not in the sense the perennialists use it but as ordinarily used as a substitute term for reason i.e., conceptual intellect. However there is non discursive element in Iqbal's conception of reason. He doesn't restrict reason to conceptual intellect with which Stace contrasts intuition. But Iqbal doesn't seem to be employing the term intellect in the metaphysical or perennialist sense of the term which takes it to be supra individual universal faculty clearly distinguishable from reason as mainstream Western philosophy understands it. There is thus certain warrant in applying Stace's insights on Iqbalian approach). This point is admirably made by Stace and this only can avoid the overlap or confusion of the

respective domains of science and religion – a position which Iqbal also maintains despite contradicting it by his psychological-empiricist approach to religion at the same time. Intuition is needed to “know” God. Reason’s wings are clipped to fly in the heavenly realm. It is only after the triumph of rationalism and scientism that the issue of demythologization and the secular meaning of the scripture have arisen. The so-called higher criticism that is closely allied with demythologizer’s approach is the invention of modern scientific man. It is modern science that has demanded a rational “scientific” justification of religion – a demand that Iqbal fully concedes or legitimates. And for modern man this rational justification entails some sort of demythologization and Iqbal is thus naturally committed to the latter also.

Demythologizing project necessarily follows from the rationalist, empiricist, inductionist and naturalistic assumptions that Iqbal shares though not fully in the usual sense of these terms. It is modern man’s vain assumption that he could solve the “problem” of religion, that he could appropriate the utterly other i.e., God into his scheme of things, that he could test religion through scientific-philosophical methods, that he could make sense of “non-sensical” religion. (Iqbal implicitly and explicitly subscribes to this assumption of modern science and philosophy and provocatively titles his second lecture as “The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience”). It is on this assumption of modern science and philosophy that the validity of claims of demythologization project hinges. Religion’s realm begins where all other realms – of mind, of knowledge or science, end. The Realm of the Spirit although reflecting on the Realm of the Psyche is in ultimate analysis incommensurable with the latter. God is known only through God. The Spirit alone knows itself. The Self is known by the Self alone. Iqbal himself concedes the essential separation (and incommensurability) of the scientific and the religious realms and tries to resolve the alleged conflict between the two by pointing out to their separate spheres of action or domains that don’t overlap because they don’t interpret the same data of experience. But he violates this principle many times when he admits of science’s and philosophy’s right to have a say in religious problems and pleads accordingly for the reconstruction of religious thought and need to appropriate modern science and its claims by religion and purify and clarify and even evaluate some of its claims. He thinks that psychology could in principle enlighten us regarding the essential nature of religion although he feels that modern psychology has so far been unable to live up to these expectations.²³ He wouldn’t have

complained of modern psychology's failure in providing insight into the nature of religion had he not supposed that psychology could possibly provide it.

If we accept Osho's characterization of religion as 'refusal to demystify existence,' then demythologization that by definition implies an attempt to demystify existence is inadmissible. One must celebrate the mystery and the unknowability of God. Islam is surrender to the unknown. Accepting existence as it is along with its hierarchy and not explaining the higher in terms of the lower levels of being or existence is religion's *sine qua non*. But demythologization involves either denial of higher realms of being or existence or their appropriation in terms of the lower realms (natural or formal realms). One can at best have symbols for the higher without thereby negating it or explaining it away. The transcendental signified is unknowable in itself. This world of manifestation is His sign but only sign; it can in no way be identified with Him. It can at best serve as a dim reflection of Him but no more than this. It hasn't the principle of existence in itself. Language and thought can have no jurisdiction to stand as judge over what transcends them. This world is merely a shadow, a poor reflection of Supra-formal paradisaical archetypal other world. So this worldly reality should be represented in terms of the other world. But demythologization does exactly the opposite. It is the pretence of certitude and knowledge, of dogmatic faith in our knowledge of truth that characterizes modern Faustian mentality. Now postmodern man is rediscovering the profound symbolism in the legend of the Fall. Postmodernism has problematized the sanctity of so-called knowledge (and science) and will to knowledge. Its links with power are unearthed. Its innocent character is suspected. The biblical myth that associated original fall with tasting the fruit of tree of knowledge modernism and modern science could not comprehend. Postmodernism allows us to see deeper into this biblical myth. Our knowledge and our judgments consist of exclusions and marginalizations as Foucault says and are always guilty of meaning closure as Lyotard emphasizes. All ideologies pretend to be based on knowledge. All metanarratives claim privileged access to knowledge. Belief in the fallacy of knowledge and distrust of its claims to have access to truth, to God characterizes mysticism. Osho remarks: "A mind stuffed with knowledge is a mind which is bound to remain ignorant. Revelation comes the moment knowledge ceases. The known must cease for the unknown to be. And the true, the real, is unknown."²⁴ He also says, "A person who claims knowledge may be a theologian a philosopher, but never a religious person. A religious man accepts the ultimate

mystery, the ultimate unknowableness, the ultimate ecstasy of ignorance, the ultimate bliss of ignorance.”²⁵ Many modernist rationalist idolatries (e.g., scientism) that have resulted in great disasters are rooted in denying or suppressing the other of knowledge and reason, usurping God’s attribute of omniscience and denying the sin in the heart of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment projects. Promethean or Faustian spirit is essentially irreverent towards the sacred mystery of existence that religion always had preserved. Osho, representing the essence of mysticism (although he too could be accused of heterodoxy and demythologization at a different level) thus describes his mission in the world:

I am here to make you ignorant again if you cooperate with me this will happen, you will become ignorant, innocent. Your knowledgeability will disappear – and in that very disappearance you will find for the first time the mystery of life dancing around you and the benediction of that mystery – that mystery is God.... The original sin is the sin of knowledge. Remember the biblical story again and again. It is one of the most precious parables of human history. Adam has been turned out of the Garden of Eden because he had eaten of the tree of knowledge. His sin is his knowledge....Vomit the apple! Become innocent and ignorant again. And you will be attaining to a second childhood – and fortunate are those who can attain to second childhood, because through it and only through it, is one bridged to God.²⁶

It is ultimately credulity towards the metanarrative of science that has primarily contributed to modern man’s incredulity towards traditional “myths” and “legends” and hierarchy of existence. It is modern man’s naïve acceptance of evolutionism and reductionist methodology of modern science that compels him to reconstruct or demythologize the traditional religious “myths” and “legends.” Iqbal did believe to a certain extent in the claims of modern science and its claim to know the truth and this contributed towards his demythologizing project. Demythologization involves stripping religion of its mystery and of its transcendental reference because it believes in the imperialist claims of modern science.

The claims of demythologization couldn’t be entertained in traditional world view. The allegorical and analogical approaches to traditional doctrines that have been traditionally practiced mustn’t to be confused with modern demythologization. Although Iqbal’s demythologization is not Bultman’s demythologization but could be defended in certain instances on orthodox Sufi grounds, still he can’t be exonerated from the charge of heterodoxy because he seems to reject the traditional Islamic metaphysics, traditional cosmology and traditional psychology (as the perennialist authors like Schuon and

Nasr would understand them taking Sufism as the esoteric dimension or core of Islam; a claim that Iqbal has rejected. Neo Platonic metaphysical framework is quite alien to Islamic sensibility according to Iqbal. However as far as Iqbal's reinterpretation of traditional myths, legends and metahistorical allusions in the Quran (those of the *abadith* or Prophetic traditions he doesn't reckon with in his *Reconstruction*; he seems to bypass them) is informed by typically modern ideas of anthropology, biology and psychology and positivist bias (most importantly evolution) he is vulnerable to serious criticism from traditionalist viewpoint. It is especially from this perspective that he has been critiqued in the following pages.

Iqbal's interpretation of the metahistorical covenant with God made in pre-Eternity, the states and stations of *salik* (a traveler in Sufism), the Prophet's encounter with *Jibril*, the Qur'anic angelology and eschatology, the Qur'anic concept of Iblis, the traditional Qur'anic cosmology and psychology, its concepts of soul and spirit, intuition and revelation and most importantly the legend of the Fall and Creation myth are coloured by demythologizing exegesis. It is his approach to the legend of the Fall that is here discussed. The positivism inspired demythologizing attempts (e.g., that of Zia Gokalp) too have fared no better. Islam resists such rationalist secularist appropriations to maintain its identity, its transcendental reference that is its *raison d'être*. There can be no compromise with demythologizers because these two are parallel epistemic or cognitive universes. Iqbal's grand attempt at synthesizing the two alien world views – that of traditional Islam and the Western Modernity, couldn't convince either the traditionalist orthodoxy or the secularist modernity. Iqbal is perhaps the greatest demythologizer of Islam in the Indian subcontinent after Sir Syed. We may illustrate his demythologizing approach by seeing how he practices it in his explication or appropriation of the legend of the Fall. Appropriating certain modern biological, anthropological and psychological theories he ingeniously reinterprets the Quran in their light. He is at pains to explain away all miraculous or supernatural elements in the genesis narrative. To make the scriptural account plausible to modern mind he reconstructs the traditional account. He somehow manages to put Qur'anic stamp on it. His interpretation of the creation myth and especially the Fall is unique and unprecedented in Islamic history. Hardly has any scholar interpreted the Fall as man's ascension, his discovery of self consciousness, and his defining feature. He has gone far away from the literal and traditional interpretation of the genesis story. Iqbalian version is at variance with orthodox traditional account and with some modern accounts (like those

inspired by existentialism), but is brilliantly original and ingenious appropriation of scriptural and modern scientific approaches. Kenneth Cragg described the whole of *Reconstruction* as wild speculation and this is best illustrated in his interpretation of the Fall and the Sin. Iqbal is caught in other intractable problems like the problem of evil because of this heterodox interpretation. Iqbalian interpretation could not have been conceived in pre-modern times. It is obviously affected by and addressed to primarily Western sensibility which itself is conditioned by modern science. How daringly heterodox any reconstructionist attempt could be, of which Iqbal is the great protagonist in Islam, is exemplified here. If the project of reconstruction has any validity, such appropriations and constructions are to be expected. If one takes modernism and modern knowledge seriously and from this vantage point approaches tradition, this is not a surprising appropriation. Rejecting the traditional formulation of the concept of Islamisation of knowledge, as Iqbal does, entails such consequences. Respectful attitude towards the post-Renaissance western tradition necessitate such drastic reconstruction of traditional religious thought in Islam. Most interesting point is the fact that Iqbal represents a blend or synthesis of widely divergent approaches – Freudian and the theosophist, Darwinian and the traditionalist or modern and the ancient. His eclectic and synthetic genius is put to sharp test here. He derives momentous results and corollaries from his unique approach to this key religious story. He carries one away by his apparently convincing Qur'anic exegesis. The Quran's multivocality and layered depths of meaning and its susceptibility to multiple interpretations is here fully exploited by him. He ignores relevant prophetic traditions, classical commentaries and much of the traditional wisdom in interpreting the story of genesis. He rejects Biblical account and doesn't extend his interpretative manoeuvring to it to make it look scientific. His overall tone and style is that of a modern evolutionist anthropologist rather than that of a traditional exegete of the Quran. He also displays his selective reading of the Quran here.

Iqbal uses the word 'legend' to refer to these key events in religious narrative of genesis. This sounds quite modern but unorthodox. Iqbal makes a very sharp distinction between Qur'anic and the other scriptural accounts. This is an assumption that could be contested by the perennialist traditionalist approach to Islam.²⁷ Iqbal is enthusiastic to prove the Quran's modern relevance and sees it more allied to modern spirit than to other traditional scriptures. This is against the basic tenets of traditionalist orthodoxy and indeed seems to run against clear Qur'anic warrant to the contrary. For him

the Quran is essentially modern instead of being ancient or traditional as the traditionalists would argue. Iqbal makes the following questionable statement (from the traditionalist perspective) in this regard.

The Qur'anic method of complete or partial transformation of legends in order to besoul them with new ideas, and this to adapt them to the advancing spirit of time, is an important point which has nearly always been overlooked both by Muslim and non-Muslim students of Islam.²⁸

For such traditionalists as Schuon the Quran has no new ideas to put forward and it like other traditional scriptures is a 'space' rather than a 'time' and it would thus reject the very idea of the advancing spirit of time. Advancing times only obscure the otherwise transparent meanings of the Quran for ancients. The farther we go from the Prophet's age, the more difficult it becomes for the moderns to appreciate and cognize traditional wisdom. The Renaissance (and modernity) represents another fall of Adam rather than his rise. Traditional symbolism becomes more and more irrelevant and meaningless in the light of modern knowledge and modern man demands entirely new symbols to make any sense of religion. The clock can't be turned back. Time counts. Islam has to adjust to the changing spirit of the time. The Quran even if using ancient symbolism does appropriate what Schuon would call perversions of post-Renaissance modernity according to modernists. Or we must reconstruct and reinterpret traditional symbolism of the Quran if we are to remain relevant to modern age according to Iqbal. For Iqbal there is nothing in the Quran which runs against the modern scientific rationalist spirit and on the contrary the Quran endorses it. For him the birth of Islam is the birth of (modern scientific) inductive intellect. The Prophet of Islam stood between the ancient and the modern world and thus paved way and legitimized the project of modernity. Islam could be better appreciated by modern man as hitherto the purpose of the Qur'anic revelation was only partly revealed. The traditionalists approaching the legend from a metaphysical perspective would not approve of these assertions. If we read Schuon or Pallis on this issue and compare it to Iqbal's interpretation we will feel unbridgeable gap.

Iqbal remarks that the object of the Quran in dealing with these legends is seldom historical; it nearly always aims at giving them a universal moral or philosophical import.²⁹ However he thinks that the biblical account is historical, giving the account of the origin of first human pair by way of a prelude to the history of Israel.³⁰ Iqbal thus tries to circumscribe the import of biblical treatment of the

myth. There have been brilliant appropriations of the Book of Genesis which show its universal philosophical and moral import. What Iqbal does for the Quran many modern writers have done for the Book of Genesis. There have been brilliant attempts at reconciling modern evolutionary anthropological and historical knowledge with the Biblical account. Iqbal seems to follow fashionable modern and orthodox Muslim scholarship which in any comparison between the Bible and the Quran usually denigrates the former. The Quran time and again emphasizes its certification of other religious scriptures and thus Muslims are duty bound to defend rather than criticize them on one or the other ground. However, they usually emphasize the point that Jews and Christians have falsified their scriptures. Granting the veracity of this point, it needs to be appreciated in the light of those Qur'anic verses which put seal and certify the truth of other scriptures. The Quran time and again authenticates rather than abrogates the other scriptures, although there are a few verses which accuse Jews and Christians of the falsification of Scripture. But the emphasis is on authentication rather than abrogation. Also this abrogation has been differently interpreted or understood by certain classical authorities.

Iqbal denies any cognitive or empirical or historical element in the legend. Writing in a style reminiscent of some modern anthropologists like Fraser, he observes:

confining ourselves to the Semitic form of the myth. it is highly probable that it arose out of the primitive man's desire to explain to himself the infinite misery of his plight in an uncongenial environment, which abounded in disease and death and obstructed him on all sides in his endeavour to maintain himself.³¹

The Qur'anic view of creation starts from the first man who is a prophet and thus endowed with the highest intellectual and moral capabilities. He was not primitive in the sense evolutionists think. The myth of the fall relates more to the spirit than to the body and psyche. Iqbal primarily emphasizes the biological and psychological dimensions and relegates to the background profound spiritual or religious and existential dimensions. From the traditionalist perspective it is modern man rather than the so-called primitive man who deserves the derogatory title of primitive man.

Iqbal distinguishes between the Qur'anic use of words *Insan* and Adam. He argues that the word Adam is retained and used more as a concept than as the name of a concrete human individual. He cites the Qur'anic verse (7:11) as a warrant for it. However he has evolutionary theory in mind while making this unique exegesis. There is also not sufficient Qur'anic warrant. The verse he quotes "We

created you; then fashioned you; then we told angels; prostrate yourself unto Adam” is interpretable and has been interpreted differently. The whole mass of prophetic tradition is against him. Muslims, throughout their history, have believed, not quite unwarrantedly, in Adam as the name of a concrete human individual, the first man and the prophet. The fact is that the evolutionist account is difficult to square with the plain Qur’anic narrative, especially the philosophical and religious connotations of the former. There are significant reasons why traditional Islam opposes the theory of evolution. The first man is seen by the Quran as a vicegerent of God. Adam is the first *Basbr* or *Insan*,— to problematize Iqbalian binary. Man didn’t evolve (especially his spiritual faculty) according to the Qur’anic world view. His bodily evolution could be conceded as Maurice Bucaille argues in his *What is the Origin of Man: The Answers of Science and Holy Scriptures* from the Qur’anic view point but his psychological and spiritual evolution can’t be unproblematically derived from the Quran. Darwinism, especially its philosophical naturalism, isn’t reconcilable with the traditional Qur’anic picture of man, his origin and destiny.

Iqbal due to his evolutionist approach is forced to demythologize in rationalist terms the profoundly pertinent traditional myths or symbols of the Quran. Syed Vahidudin has justifiably taken Iqbal to task for his demythologizing attitude. He aptly remarks: ”Iqbal doesn’t accept the Qur’anic legends at their face value but offers some very stimulating observations. But in his fervor for demythologization, he completely secularizes the Qur’anic motives and their transcendental dimension is lost sight of.”³²

Iqbal says that the word Adam is reserved by the Quran for man in his capacity of God’s vicegerent. But strictly speaking, the word Adam in this sense has been used in the Quran only in 2:30-31, as Saeed Sheikh also notes in his annotation of Iqbal’s lecturers.³³ Iqbal adopts this selective exclusionist way of reading the Quran throughout his discussion on the Qur’anic legend of the Fall.

Iqbal interprets the word *jannat* as used in connection with Adam’s primordial abode as the “conception of a primitive state in which man is practically unrelated to his environment and consequently doesn’t feel the sting of human wants the birth of which alone marks the beginning of human culture.”³⁴ However, as Vahidudin remarks: “While it is perfectly legitimate to raise the question whether the *janna* which man has lost is identical with the Janna to which the righteous are destined, it isn’t legitimate to convert it into an earthly abode.”³⁵ Vahidudin’s remarks on Iqbal’s concept of hell and heaven apply here also. He says:

In any case the transempirical reference can only be dispensed with at the risk of alienating oneself from the Qur'anic frame of reference. The alienation from the source of the religious experience is, indeed, the risk which all efforts at demythologization with reference to different religious traditions are exposed to.³⁶

Iqbal, if we read between the lines seems to deny the reality of the Fall altogether. Man has not fallen from any heavenly Edenic abode to this earth. He was in and has grown from the earth. Earth greets man.³⁷ It is man's very home. Iqbal is quite contented with this earthly home and asks God to wait for him.³⁸ The Quran says that man has been created in trouble and that he was thrown out, disgraced, from paradise to this earth. The earth by no means appears to be his original home.³⁹ There was definitely some kind of fall and definitely man has been punished in some significant sense for his original act of disobedience. Man did lose something worthwhile by eating the forbidden fruit. It wasn't an unmixed blessing for him to lose his original home. Adam wept bitterly and mourned this loss, as the Prophet's traditions testify. Iqbal's heterodoxy lies in his overlooking or ignoring of the relevant prophetic traditions here and elsewhere in his lectures. This fall may have been a rise or gain in some sense as Iqbal says but from purely religious viewpoint it was definitely a fall, a loss and Adam committed a great sin indeed by eating this forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve did usurp the Divine privilege. They did place themselves outside the Divine centre and cut themselves off in practice, though in an illusory sense, from God. Iqbal appears to welcome the Fall and sees it as the birth of self-consciousness – man's defining attribute and precious treasure. To quote him:

the Qur'anic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity, it is man's transition from simple consciousness to first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being. Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice and that is why according to the Qur'anic narration Adam's first transgression was foreign⁴⁰.

This is in fact an apology for man's primordial act of disobedience. This is humanism plain and simple. This is compromising with the fallen man's view of things.

Countless volumes have been written on the Fall and its relation to the problem of evil. Iqbal has taken a very problematic and vulnerable position vis-à-vis the problem of evil because he denies

any significant connection between the evil and the Fall. Profound Christian insights into the nature of evil and sin are denied at one stroke by Iqbal. Indeed the word 'sin' with its traditional connotations hardly ever occurs in Iqbalian philosophy. He denies man's primordial sin and he denies any sin in subsequent history of mankind. The Quran has to be drastically reinterpreted and indeed new canons of its interpretation evolved for deriving such notions out of it. Religious and psychological perspective on moral evil starts from man's this primordial propensity to evil. The doctrine of original sin has profound psychological and existential truth. Even thoroughly secularized modern man is unable to deny it. Man's moral fallibility and instinctual propensity towards evil is a fact of which Iqbal has no satisfactory explanation. Religion accounts for it by positing evil in the very constitution of things; in his Fall. The fallen state is indeed evil. Religion takes some kind of fall for granted. It is only then that it speaks of Deliverance, Nirvana, Salvation, Grace, Mercy and Heaven. Although Islam doesn't seem to share Hellenistic-Christian-Neitzschean sense of the tragic and evil, still it emphasizes man's ingratitude and his unheeded attitude towards divine summons. Fruits of man's rejection of God and his moral depravity are gathered in the Qur'anic account of numerous ruined cities or habitations of man. Iqbal has too sanguine an estimate of man's goodness. True to the humanistic tradition, he does not fully recognize dark reality of sin or *zulum* to which the Quran testifies. In rejecting the Christian doctrine of original sin he seems to forget Qur'anic reservations on man's perfection and goodness and its testifying to inexplicable wickedness of man as displayed in his moral record in history. He makes a caricature of Christian approach, whose profound moral and psychological insights he misses. He writes: "Nor does the Quran regard the earth as a torture hall where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin."⁴¹ Humanity has something profoundly wrong in it. Even if not elementally wicked, still there is lingering stubborn element of wickedness in man. The earth may not be a torture hall but man is here not on a vacation or holiday. Even heaven isn't a holiday as Iqbal himself concedes.⁴² Man is indeed created in trouble. This world if not the vale of tears is definitely the vale of soul making as Iqbal also concedes. But difficult and painful indeed is this soul making. Man wins immortality or heaven at a great cost. Most men seem too weak to pay the necessary cost. Their egos, as Iqbal is forced to admit, may suffer dissolution. Our soul making odyssey is littered with too many failures and is accompanied by too much pain. So this world is, to assert the obvious fact, a kind of

torture hall where men are involved in painful soul making saga. It may well be interpreted as punishment if one wishes. The trial man is facing in this life or this world for the winning of personality, to use Iqbalian phrase, is hard indeed. Most men succumb to the lowliest of the low state by giving their souls to Satan, being deluded and tempted by Satanic viles and temptations of *Mara*. 'Most men will go to hell,' the Quran affirms.

Man has foolishly accepted the trust of personality according to the Quran. The Quran doesn't share Iqbal's sanguine estimate of man's moral worth. What religion conveys through the legends of the Fall and emphasis on moral evil and thus need of God's Grace or *Fazl* and Mercy and His role in man's deliverance or salvation is missed by Iqbal. The Quran, in line with all traditional religions, emphasizes the great significance of evil. Shabir Akhtar in his *A Faith for All Seasons* illustrates the meaning the Quran's profound symbolism of the legend of the Fall (that Iqbal relegates to background) and its emphasis on the darker face of human nature, which is in remarkable congruence with not only Christian but even Buddhist emphasis on moral and physical evil in the world. The Quran, no less than the Torah and the New Testament condemns any excessively sanguine estimate of the purely human potential for self-perfectibility through obedience to the revealed law.

Man who is vicegerent of God and inheritor of divine kingdom, worthy of the immortal life, nobler than angels, made in the image of God, is built of not only the noblest stuff (Iqbal mostly sees only this part of the picture) but also the vilest of clay. He is more often than not inclined to evil and reduced to the "lowest of the low and gravitates towards the ground" (Quran 7:176). Although he is the epitome of God's fair handiwork, semi divine and angels have prostrated before him according to the Quran, he is also created weak (4:28) and his nature conceals a permanent emotional restlessness (6:19) is 'made of haste' (17:11), impetuous, weak willed, foolish and short sighted. Man has a natural tendency to wrong doing. Human rejection of God and perverse heedlessness that litter the human Saga, of which the Quran complains, question optimistic progressivistic evolutionary thesis (that demythologizers share) and its Qur'anic warrant. To quote Shabir Akhtar:

We have here the irrefutable testimony of the sacred volume itself. The picture is a lugubrious one, of an incorrigible humanity addicted to sin and ingratiated, never turning in repentance until their cup is full (34:15-19). An admittedly forbearing Sovereignty willn't tolerate disobedience and obduracy. God warns; men disregard; and again. And then, Allah's judgment comes suddenly while the sinners sleep the sleep and

heedlessness: morning finds a generation fallen prostrate in its habitation (7:78).⁴³

The significance of sin, or *ẓulm* in the Qur'anic vocabulary, is not duly appreciated by modernist humanist writers like Iqbal. Satan, concedes the Quran (34: 20), found true his judgment about a rebellious humanity.

Iqbal hardly reckons with the disturbing role of Satan in the legend of the Fall. He has no more role than to lead man away from his pursuit of inductive knowledge and diplomatically keeping him ignorant of the joy of perpetual growth and expansion.⁴⁴ The only way to correct man's Faustian tendency of seeking short cuts to knowledge was to place him in an environment which however painful, was better suited to the unfolding of his intellectual faculties, in Iqbal's account.⁴⁵ This environment is our present painful physical environment. Thus Iqbal relegates to the background the whole problem of moral evil and Satan's role in it. Man's universal rejection of prophets and his consequent condemnation to hell – "painful realization of one's failure as a man" – is time and again lamented in the Quran. This dimension for evil and consequence of Man's Fall are ignored by Iqbal. Iqbal is unduly swayed by what may be called man's epistemological dimension. For him knowledge – not the knowledge of God or gnosis but the empirical knowledge gained primarily through inductive intellect – is the *raison d'être* of man's existence as if knowledge will deliver men out of ignorance, out of the hell he is in. Satan, the principle of evil and one of the central characters in religious drama, has a role related to this project only. This is tantamount to subversion of religious narrative in this regard. This is demythologizing spirit let loose. Even Dr. Faustus of Marlowe didn't take such comfortable view of Satan. Amongst the numerous adjectives the Quran uses against man he mentions only his being hasty (*ajul*) by nature in this connection. Iqbal reduces the key religious issue of the Fall to only an issue of getting this or that kind of knowledge. Against the orthodox Christian and Islamic conception of this tree that takes it as a symbol for knowledge of good and evil Iqbal believes with Madame Blavatsky that this tree is a cryptic symbol for occult knowledge. Some Christians have even argued that this forbidden fruit is a kind of modern scientific knowledge. Iqbal is arguing for the exactly opposite view. It is not the man's intellectual faculty but his spiritual faculty that is the subject of the legend of the Fall. Man's knowledge (not to be understood as mystical and metaphysical realization) and not his spirit is the concern of Iqbal in his treatment of the legend of the Fall. Metaphysical issue is reduced to an epistemological one by

Iqbal. Traditional theology and metaphysics is hardly of any relevance to Iqbal here. Iqbal's demythologizing tendency is also evident in his interpretation of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Eternity. Here is displayed Freudian influence in Iqbal. He says:

The eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of eternity is life's resort to sex-differentiation by which it multiplies itself with a view to circumvent total extinction. It is as if life says to death. If you sweep away one generation of living things, I will produce another.⁴⁶

Although the legitimacy of this interpretation can't be ruled out yet the profound transcendental or metaphysical significance of this symbolism remains primary of which one must take due cognizance. Otherwise one risks overlooking the Quran's motive in alluding to such things. There have been many beautiful interpretations of this symbol of the Tree of Eternity. Sexual connotations have been almost universally emphasized by sacred scriptures as well as by secular interpretations. However sex has to be understood not in the usually accepted narrow sense of the term but in a wider context that involves man's whole being and thus has metaphysical dimensions as well. Iqbal says that "the Quran rejects the phallic symbolism of ancient art, but suggests the original sexual act by the birth of the sense of shame disclosed in Adam's anxiety to cover the nakedness of his body."⁴⁷ There seems to be a contradiction in this statement. How could the Quran reject phallic symbolism when it also points to an original sexual act?

Iqbal, unlike Schuon, doesn't possess the complex and subtle metaphysical insights that alone clear the meanings of the legend of the Fall. Iqbal does possess some profound insights into the matter but as it is only metaphysics and esoterism that clears the meaning of the legend he ends up with problematic account of this key Qur'anic story.

We will now briefly take up Sir Syed's and Muhammed Abduh's demythologizing approach. Sir Syed whose thought influenced Iqbal, doesn't recognize the existence of angelic realm and interprets angels and *Iblis* from a naturalistic standpoint as natural or psychological forces. He deems the whole story of Adam as metaphorical and interprets the various characters in the story in varied ways. To quote him

The story of Adam, *Iblis* and the angels in the reality is not a story of some happening. It is rather a metaphorical explanation of interplay of good and evil forces within man. There are several other such metaphors in the Quran.

The term Satan or *Iblis* in the Quran does not denote any essentially physical existence, but denotes evil or devilish forces concealed within man.⁴⁸

Thus metaphysical or transcendental reference is rejected by Sir Syed. Modern science and evolutionary biology and the advocates of demythologization would hardly find anything objectionable in Sir Syed's account.

Abduh has dealt with the narrative of genesis in greater detail than Sir Syed has done. He attempted to categorize the verses pertaining to the creation of Prophet Adam as ambiguous and deemed the story of Adam as allegorical through certain far fetched interpretations. Though he, like Afghani, critiqued Sir Syed as naturalist he cannot himself be exonerated from this charge. In fact as Shihabuddin Nadvi has pointed out he appears to be a bigger naturalist than Sir Syed.⁴⁹ His following remarks speak loudly about his demythologizing exegesis:

Jannat or Heaven could be more appropriately interpreted as pleasure, ease and happiness. It is also correct to say that Adam denotes the whole mankind as a clan is known by the name of his father.

....Prohibited tree means evils and intransigence....The living in *Jannat* and expulsion may be divinely ordained acts are destined to happen. The living and expulsion from *Jannat* (heaven) denotes various stages such as childhood, an age when happiness is the sole preoccupation of man; so the childhood represents heavenly happiness. Thus the child lives in an eternally genial atmosphere as if in a garden where canals flow, birds chirp, dense trees spread their shades, and remain laden with fruits. The description of mate encompasses all human beings irrespective of being male or female.... Satanic temptations mean the evil spirit behind man. It is to show that man is by virtue of his sublime nature inclined towards virtues and only temptations lead him to vices. Expulsion from heaven means that man gets into difficulties by transgressing the laws of nature.⁵⁰

In comparison to these attempts Iqbal's demythologization is quite sophisticated and convincing and appropriates both modern knowledge and the Quran from the perspective of his philosophy of ego. It is not too wild a guess work.

It needs to be made clear that Iqbal cannot be bracketed with those demythologizers who deny hierarchy of existence and are committed to thorough going naturalism. Though his exegesis of certain traditional myths reveals influence of demythologizing methodology he remains fundamentally a metaphysician and quite an orthodox believer in Islam. He believes in the ontological reality of traditional religious symbols. He believes in the literal reality of afterlife or posthumous life of ego. For him the soul rather than the

body, consciousness rather than matter, invisible rather than the visible are the primary realities. The world of space and time are thought's interpretations on the creative activity of God. The universe is a fleeting moment in the life of God. Body is spirit in space time reference. He had firm belief in miracles. He never questioned traditional belief in angels. Hell and heaven were as real as this world, rather more real. However when it comes to rational philosophical treatment of traditional symbols he becomes too apologetic and doesn't know how to translate these things in such terms that modern man, who is committed to positivist evolutionist rationalist scientific world view, can understand. He didn't realize that there can hardly be made any compromise with modern scientific methodological and philosophical commitments. He was not in possession of metaphysically strong traditional intellectual perspective. He had to address secular disbelieving age and hoped to appeal to it by making serious concessions to its spirit.

Orthodox Islam can't allow development of any demythologization within it. Such attempts as those of Iqbal and Sir Syed have not been generally accepted. The traditional spirit or orthodoxy of Muslims has been very strong and hasn't allowed a counterpart of secular theological and demythologizing movement in Islam. *Batini* movement despite its Sufi cloak was never accepted by the *jumhoor*. The same is true about *Mu'tazillites* movement. Science inspired demythologization cannot expect a different fate.

The traditionalists reject the whole enterprise of modern science and thought that has logically culminated in demythologization and secular theology. Why there is no need of demythologization in their view will be clear by following account of their position vis-à-vis the supernatural or unseen order of things, which, needless to say is irreconcilable with assumptions of demythologization.

Religion, as William James correctly noted, is vision of hierarchical universe. For him: "In its broadest terms, religion says that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in rightful relation to it."⁵¹ Modern science rejects invisibles out of hand and we are still so under its sway that it is almost impossible to take seriously the prospect that there are things that don't need physical underpinnings. Iqbal is concerned with the levels of Reality that physics, biology and psychology explore. This means such traditional sciences as astrology, parapsychology etc. are not sciences or are pseudosciences (In fact Iqbal does reject all occultist sciences as superstition.) The metaphysics that grounds traditional sciences has hardly any place in modern scientific framework. Demythologization becomes imperative in such a context for a religious modernist. The

supraformal world is not a subject matter or concern of these sciences; in fact it is denied existence by the official ideologue of scientism. The suprasensible world is hardly the concern of these sciences; they ignore or deny it on *a priori* grounds. So modern sciences are not symbolist; there is no higher world of which the things of the natural world are symbols. The traditional notion of archetypes doesn't figure in the evolutionary worldview. We need not invoke the supraformal ontological realities to explain anything on earth. But many problems that currently baffle scientists and are of fundamental importance can't be answered because their answers lie on levels of reality that science can't access. Modern existentialism is much influenced by science's reductionist account of traditional idea of degrees of reality (though it critiques it for certain other reasons); indeed science and existentialists (especially the atheistic brand of it) acknowledges no existence of supraindividual suprarational supernatural levels of reality and can't see beyond phenomenal, the visible world on a priori grounds. The angelic realm, the supraformal world isn't an object of science. But is religion's very soul. Arguing for the spiritual interpretation of universe in the framework of such physicist philosophers as Eddington and Jeans willn't approximate the traditional religious interpretation of universe. Iqbal's advocacy of religious worldview, using primarily the framework of modern science, is bound to be problematic. There is hardly any scope for miracles and the magic in the framework of modern rationalist naturalistic science (and that is why they hardly figure in *Reconstruction*). Miracles will somehow be appropriated using reductionist logic. Psychoanalysis and evolutionism -- the two great modern myths -- claim to supply those missing dimensions or causes that really higher levels of existence or vertical reference alone can supply. What consequences would follow on accepting such prejudices of modern science are hardly anticipated. I quote Schuon at length to show how fallacious are modern science's methodological and philosophical assumptions and the harmful results that have followed from its wide acceptance, amongst which demythologization is not the least important. Most of this critique applies to Iqbalian approach in principle who speaks on behalf of modern science. Iqbal can't escape this critique of his position as it follows logically or by simple extrapolation from his writing.

In view of the fact that modern science is unaware of the degrees of reality, it is consequently null and inoperative as regards everything that can be explained only by them, whether it be a case of magic or of spirituality or indeed of any belief or practice of any people; it is in

particular incapable of accounting for human or other phenomena of the historic or prehistoric past, the nature of which and the key to which are totally unknown to it as a matter of principle. There is scarcely a more desperately vain or naïve illusion - far more naïve than is Aristotelian astronomy!-than to believe that modern science, in its vertiginous course towards the 'infinitely small' and the 'infinitely great' will end up by re-joining religious and metaphysical truths and doctrines.⁵²

Scientific philosophy is unaware, not only of the 'Divine Presences', but also of their rhythms or 'life' ; it is ignorant not only of the degrees of reality and the fact of our imprisonment in the sensory world, but also of the cycles, the universal solve et coagula; that is to say it knows nothing either of the 'gushing forth' of our world from an invisible and effulgent Reality, or of its re-absorption into the 'dark' light of this same Reality. All the Real is in the Invisible; it is this above all that must be felt or understood before one can speak of knowledge and effectiveness. But this will not be understood, and the human world will continue inexorably on its course."⁵³

The profound mystical symbolism of the tree of knowledge is beautifully presented by Thomas Teherene in *Centuries of Meditation*. This also explains why it is indeed a great loss and why we need, every moment, to recover the lost paradise. Far from being any evolutionary advance or irrecoverable it is the very mandate of religions and mystical traditions to undo the fall and vomit the forbidden fruit.

Will you see the infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness? Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb, and that divine light wherewith I was born are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe. . . .

Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world, than I when I was a child.

My very ignorance was advantageous. I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence. All things were spotless and pure and glorious: yea, and infinitely mine, and joyful and precious. I knew not that there were any sins, or complaints or laws. I dreamed not of poverties, contentions or vices. All tears and quarrels were hidden from mine eyes. Everything was at rest, free and immortal, I knew nothing of sickness or death or rents or exaction, either tribute or bread. . . .

All Time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath. . . .

All things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared: which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. . . .⁵⁴

And “Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father’s Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial joys; having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels.”

Thus from the perennialist point of view traditional myths describe something which is far more real and objective entity than our demythologizers would concede. Theological Modernism with all its aberrations including the demythologization is unwarranted in its perspective. What we need is not demythologization but resurrection and reinscription of the myths and this will be done only after the grand claims of modern science regarding demystification of life are rejected. We need to be deconditioned from our scientific prejudices so that the Invisible world appears more real, more objective than the supposedly real world of phenomena, of *maya*. Only after we reject the superstition of facts and the myth of modern science and then see through the illusory realm of *maya* could we really resuscitate traditional hierarchic vision of the universe. And then it will appear to us that myths count far more than the so-called facts. In the post-secular postmodern era when grand narratives of modern science and secular humanism stand deconstructed, the space is open for so far marginalized and suppressed “narrative” of traditional perspective as Huston Smith has argued in *Beyond the Postmodern Mind*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ For Bultman’s explications of his demythologizing project see “New Testament and Mythology” (1941), in H. W. Bartsh, ed., *Kerygma and Myth*, vol1, London, SP C K, 1964.

² As refereed to in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (*Macropaedia*) entry “Religion, the history of”

³ Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Ed. and Annot. M. Saeed Sheikh Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1997, New Delhi, Preface P xxi

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pxii.

⁸ Ibid., pp77, 78.

⁹ The traditionalist perennialist perspective began to be enunciated in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century by the French metaphysician Rene Guenon, although its precepts are considered to be timeless and to be found in all authentic

traditions.. It is also known as Perennialism, the perennial philosophy, or *Sophia Perennis*. The other founding figures of the traditionalist school were French metaphysician Frithjof Schuon and the Ceylonese scholar A.K. Coomaraswamy. Other important figures in the traditionalist school include Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Marco Pallis, W.N. Perry, Syed Hussain Nasr, Lord Northbourne, Leo Schaya, Philip Sherrard, Rama Coomaraswamy, J.E., Brown, Charles le Gai Eaton. There are, apart from the traditionalists themselves, several scholars and thinkers whose work exhibits, in varying degree, a strong traditionalist influence. Mention may be made of Huston Smith, T. Izutsu, Elemire Zolla, Katheleine Raine, Brian Keble, William Chittick, James Cutsinger, E.F. Schumacher.

Philosophia perennis pertains to a knowledge which is of universal character "both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles." This knowledge which is available to the intellect (which in the traditionalist perspective is a supra-individual faculty distinct from reason though the latter is its reflection on the mental plane) is, moreover, contained in the heart of all religions or traditions

¹⁰ Nasr. S. H., *The Need for a Sacred Science*, SUNNY, New York, 1993, p.7.

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Quoted by Larry Witham in *By Design: Science of God*, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd. Chandigarh, 2004, p. 157.

¹⁴ All the quotes from Freud are from his work *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

¹⁵ In fact Iqbal is primarily a religious metaphysician and declares that religion has never, in its history, taken itself as a matter of feeling alone and has constantly striven after metaphysics (p17 of *Reconstruction*).

¹⁶ Vahidudin, Syed, *Islam in India : Studies and Commentaries*, Vol. III, ed. Christian W Troll, Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1986, p.76.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹ Quoted by Stace, W. T. in *Time and Eternity: An Essay Concerning Philosophy of Religion*, Princeton University Press, London, 1952, p. 1.

²⁰ Stace, W. T. op. cit., p. 9.

²¹ Osho, *Take it Easy : Poems of Ikkayū*, Rajneesh Foundation International, Vol. 1, 1979.

²² Iqbal, M., *Reconstruction*, p. 31.

²³ Ibid., p.151.

²⁴ Osho, *Psychology of the Esoteric : New Evolution of Man*, Orient Paper Backs, New Delhi, 1978, p.147.

²⁵ Ibid., p.151.

²⁶ Osho, *Come Follow Me: The Sayings of Jesus*, Vol.2, Rajneesh Foundation International, 1977, p.401.

²⁷ The traditionalist approach is best represented in the writings of great French Muslim Sufi and metaphysician Frithjof Schuon. The traditionalist approach to the problem of modern science is to be found in various writings of Syed Hussain Nasr.

²⁸ Iqbal, M., *Reconstruction*, p. 65.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

³¹ Ibid., p. 66.

³² Vahidudin, Syed, op. cit., p. 59.

³³ Iqbal, M., op. cit., p.170, ff. 48. This very selective reading of the Quran is paralleled elsewhere in his lectures, e.g., he rejects eternity of hell, which occurs as refrain in the Quran on the basis of Qur'anic verse (78:23) which for him gives a sufficient warrant for such a bold thesis.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

³⁵ Vahidudin, Syed, op. cit., p. 160.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁷ Iqbal, M., op. cit., p. 67.

³⁸ Seed Iqbal's poem *Roohi- Arzi Adam Ko Salam Karti hay* in his *Kulliyat*.

³⁹ See Iqbal's *Bali Jibril* where following famous lines occur: Why had you driven me out in preeternity/World is too much with us, wait.

⁴⁰ Iqbal M. *Reconstruction*, pp. 67-68.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁴² Ibid., p. 98.

⁴³ Akhtar, Shabir, *A Faith for All Seasons: Islam and Western Modernity*, Bellew Publishing London, 1990, p. 163.

⁴⁴ Iqbal M. *Reconstruction*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *Hayaate Javeed* of Altaf Hussain Hali, Taraqqi Urdu Board, New Delhi, 1979, p. 526.

⁴⁹ Nadvi, M. Shihabuddin, *Evolution and Creation*, Furqania Academy Trust, 1998, p. 80.

⁵⁰ Quoted in M. Shihabuddin Nadvi, p. 80.

⁵¹ Quoted by Huston Smith in "Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of Religion" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LVIII/4 (1990)

⁵² Schuon, Frithjof, *Dimensions of Islam*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1970, p. 156

⁵³ Ibid., p. 158.

⁵⁴ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, 1636-1674 (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell), p. 19