

IMAGE OF GOD
A NOTE ON SCRIPTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

ABSTRACT

All the Abrahamic traditions agree that it is only man who, alone among earthly creatures, is made in the image of God in a direct and integral manner. This is, however, no longer the underpinning of our prevalent view of man. Autonomous statecraft and excessive individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful. A few centuries of unbridled activity has led Western philosophy to an impasse. The metaphysical doctrine of man in the fullness of his being, in what he is, but not necessarily what he appears to be, is expounded in various languages in the different traditions with diverse degrees of emphasis which are far from being negligible. Some traditions are based more upon the divinized human receptacle while others reject this perspective in favour of the Divinity in Itself. Some depict man in his state of fall from his primordial perfection. God had created Adam to be his vicegerent. Vicegerency is the birthright of his children subject to the condition of "God has promised those who have faith and work wholesome deeds to make them vicegerents in the earth, even as He made those who were before them vicegerents". To be God's vicegerent means, among other things, to manifest all the divine attributes in the form of which human beings were created. Only by embodying God's own qualities can human being represent Him. But we know that most people do not live up to their potential. Our perfection in the likeness of concentric circles and centripetal radii; both of which are disposed in view of the Divine Center.

All the Abrahamic traditions agree that it is only man who, alone among earthly creatures, is made in the image of God¹ in a direct and integral manner. This is, however, no longer the underpinning of our prevalent view of man. Somewhere, during the course of its historical development, western thought took a sharp turn in another direction. It branched off at a tangent from the collective heritage of all humanity and claimed the autonomy of reason. It chose to follow reason alone, unguided by revelation and cut off from the Intellect that was regarded as its transcendent root.² Political and social realms quickly followed suit. Autonomous statecraft and excessive individualism in the social order were the elements that shaped a dominant paradigm that did not prove successful.³ A few centuries of unbridled activity has led Western philosophy to an impasse.⁴

A similar situation could be discerned in the arena of politics, humanities, and social sciences. The impasse, though with different implications, was reached by the parallel paradigm of autonomous politics and social sciences which had refused to accept any “infusion” from a higher domain.

The need for a revision of the paradigm is being felt. The opinions about the nature and origin of the “infusions” that could rectify or change it for the better are, however, divergent. Some try to find an alternative from within the dominant paradigm. Others suggest the possibility of a search for these “infusions” in a different direction: different cultures, other civilizations, religious doctrines, sapiential traditions. SSR, true to its principle, has decided to consider to look for it in the Scriptures again, the issue being just as important for the contemporary world as it was for the past. Because we are often unaware that contemporary arguments continue in the same lines as earlier theological debates.⁵

The basic assumptions of the dominant discourse and the prevalent world-view in this regard should be brought into question.⁶ With this end in view I would like to make a probe into the viability or even authenticity and soundness of the underpinnings of the contemporary mind-set and ask the inevitable question, “What is Man” according to the Scriptures? The other inevitable question,

which dovetails the earlier one, lurks in the wings, “What is the cosmos”?

“To be human means to be more than human,” St. Augustine recalled. What does this “more” indicate? The supra individual dimensions of human personality as well as the cosmic order is linked up with the concept of reality itself: reality as a multi-storey building or as a mansion that has no upper storey. This in turn is connected to the microcosmic reality of the human self, of which we have two models. One regards the human self as the point of intersection where the Divine touches the human realm, and this view situates the human microcosm in a hierarchical relationship with other levels of being. This model and its governing concept of reality are the shared heritage of all the known spiritual, metaphysical and religious traditions of mankind. Lord Northbourne summarizes the two approaches to the question, “What is Man?” in a simple and straightforward manner:

“Are you in fact a being created by God in His own image, appointed by him as his representative on earth and accordingly given dominion over it, and equipped for the fulfillment of that function with a relative freedom of choice in thought and action which reflects the total absence of constraint attributable to God alone, but at the same time makes you liable to err? Are you essentially that, and only accidentally anything else?

Or, alternatively, are you essentially a specimen of the most advanced product so far known of a continuous and progressive evolution, starting from the more or less fortuitous stringing together of a protein molecule in some warm primeval mud, that mud itself being a rare and more or less fortuitous product of the evolution of the galaxies from a starting point about which the physicists have not yet quite made up their minds?”⁷

In other words, the two models suggest that man could either be a Viceroy, Vicegerent or Pontiff or else a cunning animal with no destiny beyond the grave.⁸ Regarding the former model, S. H. Nasr says:

“The concept of man as the pontiff, bridge between Heaven and earth, which is the traditional view of the *anthropos*, lies at the antipode of the modern conception of man which envisages him as the Promethean earthly creature who has rebelled against Heaven and tried to misappropriate the role of the Divinity for himself. Pontifical man, who, in the sense used here, is none other than the traditional man, lives in full awareness of the Origin which contains his own perfection and whose primordial

purity and wholeness he seeks to emulate, recapture, and transmit ... He is aware that precisely because he is human there is both grandeur and danger connected with all that he does and thinks. His actions have an effect upon his own being beyond the limited spatio-temporal conditions in which such actions take place. He knows that somehow the bark which is to take him to the shore beyond after that fleeting journey which comprised his earthly life is constructed by what he does and how he lives while he is in the human state.”⁹

Tremendous is the difference that separates the shared perspective of the Abrahamic faiths represented by the foregoing texts and the contemporary paradigm of progress and social development that Tage Lindbom has aptly described as “the kingdom of man.” Given that the prevalent paradigm is losing its viability and there is a growing mistrust about its future, we are hardly in a position at this juncture to reject any alternative out of hand. “Infusions” from other domains hitherto considered alien to social development may be carefully examined and we can ask ourselves individually as well as collectively which of the alternatives has a greater ring of truth? The message which this overall intellectual exercise conveys is not to underestimate the magnitude of the challenge presented by these now unfamiliar “infusions” and systematic claims of the Sriptures, past philosophies and sapiential doctrines. For what they say to the current thought and the contemporary mind-set is in effect “either accept this overall standpoint or do better by finding or inventing a superior system of thought.” The modern world, in all probability, does not have a superior system of thought that provides sufficient grounds for disregarding the traditional system.

Every ‘revealed’ tradition is agreed upon the essential structure of the human psyche, of that invisible inner universe which is the properly human kingdom, from which we have ‘fallen’ into natural life; all holding our present state of consciousness as imperfect in relation to that which we essentially are, man as first created in the order of ‘origins’, by which a temporal beginning in the sense of the scientific evolutionists¹⁰ is not of course meant, but rather the type, pattern, archetype of the *anthropos*, ‘made in the image of God’. The ‘human’, according to tradition, is not, as for our own society, natural man but the archetypal perfect humanity, of whom every average man is a more or less obscured and distorted image. Our own secular society has sought to make everyone happy by taking as the norm ‘fallen’ man, Plato’s dwellers in the Cave; but flattery of our fallen, or

forgetful condition can only superficially and briefly deceive us into believing that all is well, that we are all we should be, since each of us carries within ourselves, however obscured, the image of the *anthropos*.¹¹ The goal of human life is the total realization and attainment in our lives of this archetypal humanity, our true spiritual identity.

The metaphysical doctrine of man in the fullness of his being, in what he is, but not necessarily what he appears to be, is expounded in various languages in the different traditions with diverse degrees of emphasis which are far from being negligible. Some traditions are based more upon the divinized human receptacle while others reject this perspective in favour of the Divinity in Itself. Some depict man in his state of fall from his primordial perfection and address their message to this fallen creature, whereas others, while being fully aware that the humanity they are addressing is not the society of perfect men living in paradise, address that primordial nature which still survives in man despite the layers of “forgetfulness” and imperfection which separate man from himself.¹²

And let us not forget that the image of man is always the image that man conceives of himself. The image bears back upon its author, who thus never quite frees himself from the spell it casts upon him.¹³ In what follows I would try to have a look at the Islamic image of man preceded by a few remarks on the Jewish and Christian anthropology.

Expressions differ. But the *children of Ibrahim* share the basic insights that inform the concept of man common to all the three Abrahamic traditions. Other religious and metaphysical traditions of mankind also express the same vision though in a different mode of expression and in a different terminology but that is out of our purview at the moment.¹⁴

Dust and Divinity

Grappling with the most crucial element in human thinking, when the Jewish tradition tried to find meaning in human existence, it faced the self-directed question “what does it mean to be a human self?” Jews were intensely interested in human nature, but not for the brute facts of the case. They wanted truth-for-life. They wanted to understand the human condition so as to avail themselves of its highest reaches. They were acutely aware of human limitations. Compared with the majesty of the heavens, people are “dust”,¹⁵ facing the forces of nature they can be “crushed like a moth”.¹⁶ Their time upon the earth is swiftly spent, like grass that in the morning flourishes, but “in the evening fades and withers”.¹⁷ Even this brief span is laced with pain that causes our years to end as a sigh”.¹⁸ Not

once but repeatedly the Jews were forced to the rhetorical question: “What are human beings” that God should give them a second thought?¹⁹ “Human beings ... are only animals. For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other”.²⁰ Here is a biological interpretation of the human species as uncompromising as any the nineteenth century ever produced. The significant point, however, is that this passing thought did not prevail. The striking feature of the Jewish view of human nature is that without blinking its frailty, it went on to affirm its unspeakable grandeur. We are a blend of *dust and divinity*. The word unspeakable is not hyperbole. The King James Version translates the central Jewish claim concerning the human station as follows: “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels”.²¹ That last word, we are told by Prof. Huston Smith, is a straight mistranslation, for the original Hebrew plainly reads “a little lower than the gods [or God].”²² Why did the translators reduce deity to angels? The answer seems obvious: It was not erudition that they lacked, but rather the boldness— one is tempted to say nerve — of the Hebrews. We can respect their reserve. Yet no amount of realism could dampen the aspiration of the Jews. Human beings who on occasion so justly deserve the epithets “maggot and worm”²³ are equally the beings whom God has “crowned with glory and honour”.²⁴ There is a rabbinic saying to the effect that whenever a man or woman walks down the street he or she is preceded by an invisible choir of angels crying, “Make way, make way! Make way for the image of God.”

We shall not have plumbed the full scope of its realism, however, until we add that they saw the basic human limitation as moral rather than physical. Human beings are not only frail; they are sinners: “I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me”.²⁵ The verse contributes something of great importance to Jewish anthropology.²⁶ Meant to be noble, they are usually something less; meant to be generous, they withhold from others. Created more than animal, they often sink to being nothing else.²⁷ Human beings, once created, make or break themselves, forging their own destinies through their decisions. “Cease to do evil, learn to do good”.²⁸ It is only for human beings that this injunction holds. “I have set before you life and death ... therefore choose life”.²⁹

Finally, it followed from the Jewish concept of their God as a loving God that people are God’s beloved children. In one of the tenderest metaphors of the entire Bible, Hosea pictures God yearning over people as though they were toddling infants.³⁰ Even in this world, immense as it is and woven of the mighty powers of

nature, men and women can walk with the confidence of children in a home in which they are fully accepted.

What are the ingredients of the most creatively meaningful image of human existence that the mind can conceive? Remove human frailty —*as grass, as a sigh, as dust, as moth-crushed*— and the estimate becomes romantic. Remove grandeur— *a little lower than God*— and aspiration recedes. Remove sin— *the tendency to miss the mark*— and sentimentality threatens. Remove freedom — *choose ye this day!* — and responsibility goes by the board. Remove, finally, *divine parentage* and life becomes estranged, cut loose and adrift on a cold, indifferent sea. With all that has been discovered about human life in the intervening 2,500 years, it is difficult to find a flaw in this assessment.

The Christian tradition has seen a different unfolding of the concept³¹ though it shares the original insight with regard to the basic meaning in human existence. ‘What is man?’ We find the question in the Book of Job, who asks, ‘*What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thy heart upon him?*’³² Job is quoting from a psalm (8:4) which reminds us of the paradox of human littleness and human greatness:³³

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little **lower than the angels**,³⁴ and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.*

All these texts look back, finally, to the first chapter of Genesis,³⁵ where the creation of man is described: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him.*” The passage goes on to describe the dominion given to man over all living things on the earth.

When Job reminds God of his exaltation of man he does so in bitterness, complaining that man is a creature of dust who goes down to the grave unregarded. Nevertheless the theme which runs through the Bible, from Genesis to the Epistle to the Hebrews is man as the image of God, bearer of the divine imprint; Jesus, as the Son of Man, is the realization of the first-created humanity, the *anthropos*, as imagined by the Creator before the Fall; which Fall is the result of Adam’s ‘sleep’, a loss of consciousness, a ‘descent’, as the Greeks would say, from a spiritual to a natural mode of consciousness, with a consequent self-identification not with the spiritual but with the natural body; which is, as Job complains, a thing of dust.

IMAGO DEI— GOD’S VICEGERENT

Turning to the Islamic tradition we find that the Prophet of Islam also referred to this peculiar characteristic of human beings— a blend of *dust and divinity*— when he repeated the famous saying found in the Bible quoted above— a saying that has played an important role in Jewish and Christian understandings of what it means to be human — “God created Adam in his own form” (*khlaqa Allahu al-Adama 'ala suratibi*).³⁶ Many authorities understand a similar meaning from the Qur’anic verse, “God taught Adam the names, all of them”.³⁷ In effect, all things are present in human beings, because God taught them the names or realities of all things.³⁸

The human being was created in God’s form, embracing all God’s attributes. The difference between the whole universe and the human being is that the signs are infinitely dispersed in the universe, while they are concentrated into a single, intense focus in each human individual.

God produces an inconceivably enormous cosmos with an infinite diversity of created things. If we investigate the creatures one by one the task can never be completed but if we speak in general terms, it is possible to classify created things into categories. The cosmos can be divided into two basic worlds, the unseen and the visible, sometimes referred to as “the heavens and the earth”, or “the spiritual world and the bodily world.” We have mentioned during our discussions that there is a third world that is both similar to and different from these two basic worlds, called the “world of imagination”. If these three worlds represent the general structure of the total macrocosm, the human being can be called a microcosm, since three parallel domains are found within each individual: spirit, soul, and body.

When we want to look at other bodily creatures; that is, those physical things that fill the visible universe we find inanimate objects, plants, and animals. What is interesting for our purposes is how these three kinds of creature manifest the signs of God; the divine attributes that become visible through them. Which attributes become visible in inanimate objects? Perhaps the best way to answer the question is to say that more than anything else, inanimate objects conceal God’s attributes instead of revealing them. They tell us what God is not rather than what He is.

In contrast to inanimate things, plants display several obvious divine attributes. It is easy to see that plants are alive, and life is the first of the “Seven Leaders”, the seven divine attributes that predominate in creation. Plants have certain knowledge. They certainly have desire: they want water, sunlight, fertilizer, and they

trace elements. If you treat them well and give them what they really desire – like nice, rich manure — they even show their gratitude by producing enormous crops; they are not ungrateful truth-concealers. Plants have power and can destroy stones and concrete, but they need time. But all these divine attributes are found rather feebly within plants, so *tanzih* outweighs *tashbih*.

In contrast, the divine attributes found in animals are much more intense. Moreover, animals add other attributes that are difficult to find in plants. The knowledge possessed by animals can be extraordinary, though it is always rather specialized.³⁹ The animal kingdom represents an incredible diversity of knowledge and skills, divided among a vast number of specialized organisms. Desire is also clearly present in animals, but each species desires different things, and thus a great natural harmony is created.

Both plants and animals represent a tremendous variety of specific signs. Each plant or animal species is a special configuration of divine attributes that is not reproduced in any other species.

Human beings are a species of animal, and they share many characteristics with them. But there is one remarkable characteristic that differentiates them from all other animals: Each animal is what it is, with little or no confusion. But human beings are unknown factors. Each species of animals is dominated by one or a few characteristics. The human being is infinitely malleable. What then is a human being? What brings about this fundamental difference between human beings and other animals? Muslims answer these questions in many ways. The easiest approach within our current discussion is to investigate the nature of the relationship between human beings and the divine attributes. Every creature other than a human being is a sign of God in which a specific, limited, and defined configuration of divine attributes is reflected. In contrast, a human being reflects God as God. In other creatures, some divine attributes are permanently manifest while others are permanently hidden. In human beings, all divine attributes are present, and any of them can become manifest if circumstances are appropriate.

When it is said that everything is within human beings, this is not meant in a literal sense. The principle here is easy to understand if we briefly look at the divine names. God created the universe as the sum total of his signs. The signs explain the nature of God inasmuch as he discloses and reveals himself. What does he disclose? He discloses his attributes, such as life, knowledge, power, and speech. The cosmos in its full temporal and spatial extension — everything other than God — illustrates all God's manifest attributes. Hence the macrocosm is an image, or form, of God.

The concentration of the attributes within human being makes people God's vicegerents, that is, creatures who can perform the same functions as God, with all due respect to *tanzih*. Human beings manifest all God's attributes, but in a weakened and dim manner, demanded by the fact that, although they are similar to God in respect of having been created in his form, they are different in respect of spatial and temporal limitations. God remains infinitely beyond any human being.

God created human beings in his own form, which is to say that he taught them all the names. Adam had an actualized knowledge of these names, but he was still susceptible to temporary forgetfulness. The rest of the human race is born into a heedlessness that is more than temporary. The divine qualities are latent within them, but these qualities need to be brought out from latency and be embodied in people's minds and activities.

God had created Adam to be his vicegerent. Vicegerency is the birthright of his children. However, they will only achieve the vicegerency if they follow the prophets. They must adopt the faith and practice given by God through the scriptures: "God has promised those who have faith and work wholesome deeds to make them vicegerents in the earth, even as He made those who were before them vicegerents".⁴⁰ To be God's vicegerent means, among other things, to manifest all the divine attributes in the form of which human beings were created. Only by embodying God's own qualities can human being represent Him. But we know that most people do not live up to their potential. Even if they do have faith and work wholesome deeds, they never become dependable servants of God, because caprice and heedlessness often make them ignore or forget their proper duties.

"God created Adam in His own form". Likewise, man virtually has all the Divine Names engraved in the very clay of his being. It is because of this divine similitude that God has called him to be His *khalifah*, his 'vicegerent' on earth. "Vicegerency (*khalifah*) was assigned to Adam, to the exclusion of the other creatures of the universe, because God created him according to His image. A vicegerent must possess the attributes of the one he represent; otherwise he is not truly a vicegerent."⁴¹ But these two favours granted exclusively to man, his divine form and his governance, simultaneously expose him to the greatest danger of his existence: the illusion of sovereignty. As the Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn 'Arabi points out on a number of occasions, being conscious of his original theomorphism leads man to forget that he was created from clay—

the most humble of substances and a symbol of his 'ontological servitude' (*'ubdiyya*). The power and the authority that his mandate grants him lead him to consider himself autonomous. The appropriates sovereignty, which rightfully belongs only to Him Whom he represents, and he betrays the oath of vassalage, actualization of the human theomorphic nature (*ta'alluh*), that he made when he replied to the question "*Am I Not your Lord?*" with "*Certainly, we are witnesses!*"⁴²

When he refuses to assume his status as 'servant of God' (*'abd Allah*), he is henceforth unworthy of being 'God's vicegerent' (*kehalifah Allah*). "The homeland of man is his servitude; he who leaves it is forbidden to take on the Divine Names."⁴³ To regain his original nobility, he must reactivate the divine characteristics inscribed in his primordial form; characteristics that his pretension and ignorance had covered up. "The Prophet said, 'I have come to complete the 'noble character traits.'" He who lives in accordance with the 'noble character traits' follows a law of God even if he is not aware of it [...] To perfect one's character means to strip it of all that tends to give it a vile status. Actually, vile characteristics are vile only by accident, while noble characteristics are noble by essence, for what is vile has no foundation in the divine while noble characteristics do have foundation in the divine. The Prophet perfected the noble character traits to the extent that he established the ways through which a character can maintain a noble status and exempt from vile status".⁴⁴

Underlying this passage is a major theme in Ibn 'Arabi's teaching.⁴⁵ It is by the strictest and most absolute observance of Divine Law that man is able to re-establish his original theomorphism. Every quality, including for example jealousy and anger, is noble in essence, since each has its root in a divine attribute. A quality becomes 'ignoble' and reprehensible only to the extent that it exists outside the limits imposed by the Law. Consequently, it is in conforming to the Prophet's *sunnah* and to the Law that was revealed to him that man re-integrates in himself the divine characteristics that lie dormant deep within him.

Here an other aspect of the same question may also be considered. Qur'an is God's Word, and God's Word is his self-expression.⁴⁶ Likewise, the human being is God's form — therefore his self-expression. But the Qur'an takes oral and verbal form, while the human being takes spiritual and bodily form. The Qur'an's outward form is fully manifest, in the sense that it was received once and for all and never changes. But no human being is fully present in this world at any time from birth to death. The

Qur'an is all there, but none of us is all here.⁴⁷ The point of this comparison between the oral word of God, which is the Qur'an, and the embodied form of God, which is the human being, is to bring out the Islamic teaching that, in the Qur'an, we see Gods self-expression fully manifest. In the human being, we cannot see the whole because we are situated on a small segment of the historical unfolding of that whole, an unfolding that precedes our life in this world and extends beyond our death. The Qur'an is thus a full image of God, but we, at any given point, are partial and incomplete images. Made in Gods form, we have the potential to bring all Gods attributes into externalized and embodied existence through our activities. But in order to grasp what those divine attributes are—attributes which comprise ourselves— we need an external model. That model, for Muslims, is the Qur'an, which displays the image openly. Muslims must follow the Prophet so that the Qur'an becomes their character and determines the way they think, feel, and act. This is not a closing down, but an opening up:⁴⁸

*whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam;
whomsoever He desires to misguide, He makes his breast narrow, tight.*

Islam is to embody the Qur'an. It is an opening up because, through imitating the Prophet and gaining the Qur'an as their character, people come to establish real relationships with every attribute of Reality; that is, everything good, beautiful, positive, praiseworthy, and lovable. When people follow any other way— or rather, any non-prophetic way they constrict themselves; they close down their personalities to many of the diverse dimensions of the divine form that make them what they are. To model themselves upon anything other than God is to fall into *shirk*. It is to be confused about their own reality; to think that they are this or that, or that they should be this or that, and to be unaware that God is not this or that, but the creator of every this and that. Likewise, his image cannot be limited to this and that, but embraces every this and that without being held back by any of them. The vision of human perfection that Islam offers is one of infinite possibility conjoined with total fulfillment, everlasting good fortune, and complete happiness.

The whole book, just as it expresses God, also expresses the perfected human substance of Gods foremost messenger Muhammad is the actualized divine form who, for Muslims, stands above the other actualized divine forms, the prophets and friends of God from Adam down to the end of time.

Muhammad is a mortal like everyone else, the Qur'an says. He is a human being.⁴⁹ But remember that human beings were taught all

the names, and the angels prostrated themselves before Adam. To be human is not exactly ordinary. It is a divine Trust, a special privilege, and very few people live up to it.⁵⁰ What distinguishes Muhammad from others is that he has lived up to the responsibilities of being human.⁵¹ Yes, Muhammad is a mortal like other people. But no, he is not forgetful and negligent like them, refusing to carry the Trust. He has carried it, and the whole world benefits as a result. The qualities he manifests are not his own qualities. They are the divine names and attributes.

The downward journey of mankind in terms of human perfection needs also to be taken into consideration and we shall turn to it shortly but here some further remarks on the Islamic conception of human beings with regard to the idea of “trust” seem called for.

THE TRUST

It is impossible to understand Islam’s conception of prophecy without understanding its view of human beings; and likewise, we cannot grasp what a human being is until we grasp the role of prophets in human history.

The story begins with Adam, as it does in Judaism and Christianity, but the Qur’an’s depiction of Adam diverges in important details from that of the Hebrew Bible. The result is an explanation of human nature that can be surprising— and even shocking — to people familiar only with certain other interpretations of Adam’s fall.

The Qur’anic details of Adam’s creation are well known.⁵² Here we can provide a few remarks that bring into focus Islam’s understanding of what it means to be human. We may remember that Adam is the first human being and the prototype for the whole race. What is said about Adam has something to do with the situation of everyone.

Human beings have specific characteristics that set them apart from other creatures. In one famous verse, the Qur’an refers to the sum total of these specific characteristics as “the Trust” (*amana*):

We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it. And the human being carried it. Surely he is very ignorant, a great wrongdoer (33:72)

In order to begin the task of understanding the sense of this verse, we have to remember that a trust is something precious that one person asks another person to hold for safekeeping. In this case, God has entrusted something to human beings, and they are to hold it for him. On the appropriate occasion, they will have to return it, as the word itself implies. The Qur’an says, “*God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners*” (4:58).

What have human beings received on trust from God? Like all other created things, human beings have received everything they have from God. Nothing good belongs to them, since “*The good, all of it, is in Thy hands.*” They will have to give back everything that they have, sooner or later, simply through the natural course of events. However, all creatures are compelled to give this kind of trust back to God, and human beings are no different here from anything else. Creatures are all *muslim* and *‘abd* in the most general sense of the terms, so they have no choice but to give back to God what belongs to Him. Hence, this compulsory trust is not at issue here, since choice does not enter into it. The verse of the Trust is apparently referring to some sort of free choice, and it clearly is talking about something that pertains exclusively to human beings.

The heavens, the earth, and the mountains refused to carry the Trust. The term heavens refers to the high and luminous things of the universe and earth to the low and dark things. Mountains seems to mean everything that is neither high nor low. These three terms can be understood as referring to everything other than human beings. Human beings are neither high like the angels, nor low like the minerals, nor in between like the plants and animals. Or rather, they possess all three qualities: They are high through their spirits, low through their bodies, and in between through their souls. As microcosms, they embrace the heavens, the earth, and the mountains.

Most authorities maintain that the Trust is Gods vicegerency. Only human beings are able to carry it because the vicegerency depends upon having been taught all the names. But it is not enough simply to be human to carry the Trust. People have to accept freely to be God’s servants before they can become his vicegerents. Hence, carrying the Trust involves human freedom. Compulsory *muslims* — like the heavens, the earth, and the mountains — cannot carry it.⁵³ One must be a voluntary *muslim* through accepting the guidance offered by God and putting it into practice.⁵⁴

The verse of the Trust concludes by saying that the human being “*is very ignorant, a great wrongdoer!*” The most obvious interpretation of these qualities is that they refer to those children of Adam who do not live up to the Trust. All children of Adam have been given the Trust, but most of them pretend to be ignorant of the truth of their own situation, of the fact that they are, in essence; vicegerents of God. And they are wrongdoers; that is, they put things in the wrong places and overstep the bounds of what is true and right. They arrogate the power and prerogatives of the vicegerency to themselves. They do not treat the divine attributes that they have

received from God as a trust. On the contrary, they act as if the attributes belong to themselves and can be used in any way they see fit.

Muslim thinkers have justified this Qur'anic picture of things in many ways, but we will limit ourselves to commenting on a single Qur'anic verse that they frequently cite in the context. Having created Adam, God wanted to make clear to him and to his children why they had been created. Hence, he gathered all the children of Adam together and spoke to them. The Qur'an reports what happened as follows:⁵⁵

When your Lord took their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness concerning themselves Am I not your Lord?"-they said, "Yes, we bear witness!"

This verse indicates in mythic fashion that human beings, somewhere in the depths of their souls, have all borne witness to God's Lordship. The Arabic word employed for "we bear witness" is the verb from which the word *Shabadah* (witnessing) is derived. The event referred to here is commonly called the Covenant of *Alast*, the word *alast* being the Arabic for "Am I not?" At this time, all human beings entered into a covenant with God by acknowledging Him as the one and sole Reality and agreeing to worship none but him.⁵⁶

The verse of *Alast* continues by explaining God's purpose in calling everyone to witness:⁵⁷

Lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this, "or lest you say, "Our fathers associated others with God before us, and we were their offspring after them. What, wilt Thou destroy us for what the vain-doers did?"

Interpretations of this verse differ, but most authorities maintain that it means that on the day of judgment, people will be held responsible for recognizing the truth of God being the one and sole Reality, whether or not they have heard the message of a prophet. However, they will not be held responsible for the specific teachings of a prophet if such teachings have not reached them.

To have a broader look of the question, by taking other traditions of mankind into considering also, the genesis of man, according to all traditions, occurred in many stages: first, in the Divinity Itself so that there is an uncreated aspect to man. That is why man can experience annihilation in God and subsistence in Him⁵⁸ and achieve supreme union. Then man is born in the Logos which is in fact the prototype of man and another face of that same reality which the Muslims call the Universal Man and which each tradition identifies

with its founder. Next, man is created on the cosmic level and what the Bible refers to as the celestial paradise, where he is dressed with a luminous body in conformity with the paradisaal state. He then descends to the level of the terrestrial paradise and is given yet another body of an ethereal and incorruptible nature, Finally, he is born into the physical world with a body which perishes but which has its principle in the subtle and luminous bodies belonging to the earlier stages of the elaboration of man and his genesis before his appearance on earth.⁵⁹

The traditional doctrine of man, in general and non theological terms, is based in one way or another on the concept of primordial man as the source of perfection, the total and complete reflection of the Divinity and the archetypal reality containing the possibilities of cosmic existence itself. Man is the model of the universe because he is himself the reflection of those possibilities in the principal domain which manifest themselves as the world. Man is more than merely man so that this way of envisaging his rapport with respect to the cosmos is far from being anthropomorphic in the usual sense of his term. The world is not seen as the reflection of man *qua* man but of man as being himself the total and plenary reflection of all those Divine Qualities whose reflections, in scattered and segmented fashion, comprise the manifested order.

Man's actions have an effect upon his own being beyond the limited spatio-temporal conditions in which such actions take place. He knows that somehow the bark which is to take him to the shore beyond after that fleeting journey which comprises his earthly life is constructed by what he does and how he lives while he is in the human state.

The image of man as depicted in various traditions has not been identical. Some have emphasized the human state more than others and they have envisaged eschatological realities differently. But there is not doubt that all traditions are based on the central and dominant images of the Origin and the Center and see the final end of man in the state or reality which is other than this terrestrial life with which forgetful or fallen man identifies himself once he is cut off from revelation or religion that constantly hearken man back to the Origin and the Center.

That primordial and plenary nature of man which Islam calls the "Universal or Perfect Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*) and to which the sapiential doctrines of Graeco-Alexandrian antiquity also allude in nearly the same terms, except for the Abrahamic and specifically

Islamic aspects of the doctrines absent from the Neoplatonic and Hermetic sources, reveals human reality to possess three fundamental aspects. The Universal Man, whose reality is realized only by the prophets and great seers since only they are human in the full sense of the word, is first of all the archetypal reality of the universe; second, the instrument or means whereby revelation descends into the world; and third, the perfect model for the spiritual life and the ultimate dispenser of esoteric knowledge. By virtue of the reality of the Universal Man, terrestrial man is able to gain access to revelation and tradition, hence to the sacred. Finally, through this reality which is none other than man's own reality actualized, man is able to follow that path of perfection which will finally allow him to gain knowledge of the sacred and to become fully himself. The saying of the Delphic oracle, "*Know thyself*," or that of the Prophet of Islam, "*He who knoweth himself knoweth his Lord*," is true not because man as an earthly creature is the measure of all things but because man is himself the reflection of that archetypal reality which is the measure of all things. That is why in traditional sciences of man the knowledge of the cosmos and the metacosmic reality are usually not expounded in terms of the reality of terrestrial man. Rather, the knowledge of man is expounded through and in reference to the macrocosm and metacosm, since they reflect in a blinding fashion and in an objective mode what man is if only he were to become what he really is. The traditional doctrine of Primordial or Universal Man with he really is. The traditional doctrine of Primordial or Universal Man with all its variations— *Adam Kadmon*, *Jen*, *Purusa*, *al-insan al-Kamil*, and the like embraces at once the metaphysical cosmogonic, revelatory, and initiatic functions of that reality which constitutes the totality of the human state and which places before man both the grandeur of what he can be and the pettiness and wretchedness of what he is in most cases, in comparison with the ideal which he carries always within himself. Terrestrial man is nothing more than the externalization, coagulation, and often inversion and perversion of this idea and ideal of the Universal Man cast in the direction of the periphery. He is a being caught in the field of the centrifugal forces which characterize terrestrial existence as such, but is also constantly attracted by the Centre where the inner man is always present.

It must be remembered that man, as first created, was fully endowed with intellectual intuition; in him the Fall had not yet obstructed the flow of remembrance from symbol to Archetype. There is consequently no fundamental difference between the Qur'anic doctrine that God taught Adam the names of things⁶⁰ and

the verse of Genesis which tells us that God brought His creatures to Adam to see what he would name them.⁶¹ The two scriptures differ simply inasmuch as Genesis is here the more fully informative in telling us that language came to Adam not by any outward revelation through the intermediary of an Archangel but through a no less Providential inward intellection. Both scriptures affirm, for Adam, a God-vouchsafed authority to give each thing its name, which amounts to saying that these names, far from being arbitrary, were the phonations that exactly corresponded to what they expressed, echoes or symbols of the verbal archetypes that are the means of celestial converse.

Turning now to the downward journey of mankind we can observe that the image of man has undergone a drastic change, first in the West and then, through its all pervasive influence encroaching on the worldviews of other traditions. In the recent decades many attempts have been made to trace the stages of the “disfiguration of the image of man in the West” beginning with the first stages of the promethean revolt in the Renaissance, some of whose causes are to be seen already in the late Middle Ages, and terminating with the infra human condition into which modern man is being forced through a supposedly humanistic civilization. The decomposition and disfiguration, in the history of the West, of the image of man as being himself *imago Dei*, came into the open with that worldly humanism which characterizes the Renaissance and which is most directly reflected in its worldly art. But there are certain elements of earlier origin which also contributed to this sudden fall, usually interpreted as the age of the discovery of man at the moment when the hold of the Christian tradition upon Western man was beginning to weaken.⁶²

The other elements which brought about the destruction of the image of pontifical man and helped the birth of that Promethean rebel with whom modern man usually identifies himself were mostly associated with the phenomena of the Renaissance itself and its aftermath or had their root in the late medieval period. These factors include the destruction of the unity and hierarchy of knowledge which resulted from the eclipse of the sapiential dimension of tradition in the West. From this event there resulted in turn the emptying of the sciences of the nature of their esoteric content and their quantification, the rise of skepticism and agnosticism combined with a hatred of wisdom in its Christian form, and the loss of knowledge based upon certitude, which was itself the result of

reducing Being to a mental concept and a denial of its unifying and sanctifying rays.

At the Renaissance man began to analyse mental reflections and psychic reactions and thus to be interested in the “subject” pole to the detriment of the “object” pole; in becoming “subjective” in this sense, he ceased to be symbolist and became rationalist since reason is the thinking ego. The transition from objectivism to subjectivism reflects and repeats in its own way the fall of Adam and the loss of Paradise; in losing a symbolist and contemplative perspective, founded both on an impersonal intelligence and on the metaphysical transparency of things, man has gained the fallacious riches of the *ego*; the world of divine images has become a world of words. In all cases of this kind, heaven— or a heaven— is shut off from above us without our noticing the fact and we discover in compensation an earth long un-appreciated, or so it seems to us, a homeland which opens its arms to welcome its children and wants to make us forget all lost Paradises; it is the embrace of *Maya*, the sirens’ song; *Maya*, instead of guiding us, imprisons us. The Renaissance thought that it had discovered man, whose pathetic convulsions it admired; from the point of view of laicism in all its forms, man as such had become to all intents and purposes good, and the earth too had become good and looked immensely rich and unexplored; instead of living only “by halves” one could at last live fully, be fully man and fully on earth; one was no longer a kind of half-angel, fallen and exiled; one had become a whole being, but by the downward path. The Reformation, whatever certain of its tendencies may have been, had as an overall result the relegation of God to Heaven— to a Heaven henceforth distant and more and more neutralized— on the pretext that God keeps close to us “through Christ” in a sort of biblical atmosphere, and that He resembles us as we resemble Him. All this brought with it an apparently miraculous enrichment of the aspect of things as “subject” and “earth”, but a prodigious impoverishment in their aspect as “object” and “Heaven”. At the time of the Revolution of the late eighteenth century, the earth had become definitely and exclusively the goal of man; the “Supreme Being” was merely a “consolation” and as such a target for ridicule; the seemingly infinite multitude of things on earth called for an infinity of activities, which furnished a pretext for rejecting contemplation and with it repose in “being” and in the profound nature of things; man was at last free to busy himself, on the hither side of all transcendence with the discovery of the terrestrial world and the exploitation of its riches; he was at last rid of symbols, rid of metaphysical transparency; there was no longer anything but the agreeable or the disagreeable, the

useful or the useless, whence the anarchic and irresponsible development of the experimental sciences. The flowering of a dazzling “culture” which took place in or immediately after these epochs, thanks to the appearance of many men of genius, seems clearly to confirm the impression, deceptive though it be, of a liberation and a progress, indeed of a “great period”; whereas in reality this development represents no more than a compensation on a lower plane such as cannot fail to occur when a higher plane is abandoned.

Once Heaven was closed a man was in effect installed in God’s place, the objective measurements of things were, virtually or actually, lost. They were replaced by subjective measurements, purely human and conjectural pseudo-values, and thus man became involved in a movement of a kind that cannot be halted, since, in the absence of celestial and stable values, there is no longer any reason for calling a halt, so that in the end a stage is reached at which human values are replaced by infra-human values, up to a point at which the very idea of truth is abolished.⁶³

All the great religious traditions have been attempts to cultivate the human soul. Our materialist civilization has concerned itself with the well-being of the naked apes, with food and shelter and the learning of the skills necessary to the survival of the body; but any attempt to bring order to the inner worlds, to nourish the specifically human, has gone by default. Not altogether so, of course, for the past is still powerful and two thousand years of Christendom and all the wisdom of the Greek and the Hebrew traditions before that are still there; or at least with the educated sections of society, who are less at the mercy of current ideologies. Pythagoras continues to impose upon the soul the order of the diatonic scale through such music as is still composed according to its laws.⁶⁴

Let me remind you that we are still considering the question ‘What is man?’ Man is, in truth, not a mortal worm but a spiritual being, immaterial, immeasurable, who is never born and never dies, because spirit is not bounded or contained within the categories of the material world of time and space, of duration and extension. In this sense, we are immortal, eternal, boundless within our own universe. Yet of the kingdom that is truly ours, specifically human, we have realized very little.

Our definition of *homo sapiens* being deformity— which makes of him a total being, hence a theophany – it is only logical and legitimate that, for the point of view of Islam, the final word on anthropology is conformity to celestial norms and movement

towards God; or in other words, our perfection in the likeness of concentric circles and centripetal radii; both of which are disposed in view of the Divine Center.

Our material secular society altogether fails to help educate the human soul, the invisible humanity, its deformity to flower. It has all to be remade; piece by piece reconstructing. This re-discovery, re-learning, is a long hard task—a lifelong task who undertake it; yet the most rewarding of all tasks since it is a work of self-discovery which is at the same time a universal knowledge, ‘knowledge absolute’ as the Vedas claim.

On earth the divine Sun is now veiled; as a result the measures of things become relative, and man can take himself for what he is not, and things can appear to be what they are not. Once the veil is torn, at the time of that birth that we call death, the divine Sun appears; measures become absolute; beings and things become what they are and follow the ways of their true nature!

*“You were heedless of this— therefore We have removed from you your covering, and your sight today is piercing”*⁶⁵

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ The Biblical expression says “in the image of God”. In the Islamic tradition it appears in the following Hadith report “*‘khalaf Allahu ‘l-adama ‘ala suratibi*”. See Bukhari, *Al-Sahih*, “Istidhan”, 1; Muslim, *Al-Sahih*, “Birr”, 115, “Jannah”, 28; Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. II, 244, 251, 315, 323. Also see Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futubat al Makkijyah*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, n.d., Vol. II, p. 124, p. 490. For an illuminating exposition of the the implications of the statement in terms of the Divine Attributes see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2000, p. 120.

² See Martin Lings, “Intellect and Reason” in *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, rpt. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988, 57-68; F. Schuon, *Gnosis Divine Wisdom* London: J. Murray, 1978, 93-99; S. H. Nasr, “Knowledge and its Desacralization” in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, 1-64; Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 60-95. Also see his *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989).

³ See René Guénon, “Individualism” in *Crisis of the Modern World*, (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1981, 51-65. Also see Social Chaos” in the same work.

⁴ Commenting upon the situation, Huston Smith remarked, “the deepest reason for the crisis in philosophy is its realization that autonomous reason— reason without infusions that both power and vector it— is helpless. By itself, reason can deliver nothing apodictic. Working, as it necessarily must, with variables, variables are all it can come up with. The Enlightenment’s “natural light of reason” turns out to have been a myth. Reason is not itself a light. It is more than a conductor, for it does more than transmit. It seems to resemble an adapter which makes useful

translations but on condition that it is powered by a generator.” (Huston Smith, “Crisis in Modern Philosophy”, in *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1990, pp. 137.) The nature and direction of these “infusions” is still being debated.

For a few more representative writings that indicate this situation, see “Scientism, Pragmatism and the Fate of Philosophy, *Inquiry*, No. 29, p. 278, cf. Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, loc. cit. p. 142; Hilary Putnam, “After Empiricism” in *Behaviorism*, 16:1 (Spring 1988); Alasdair MacIntyre, “Philosophy; Past Conflict and Future Direction,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Supplement to 16/1, (September 1987); also see *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 59 (1986), and Kenneth Baynes et al., *Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

⁵ Take, for example, the issue of free will and predestination, a central bone of contention among the schools of Kalam. This debate, which has also been important in Christian civilization, lives on in modern secular society, though it is no longer posed in terms of God. For example, many contemporary scholars—biologists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, political scientists—are actively involved in the discussion of nature versus nurture. The basic question is simple: Does nature determine human development, or can people change themselves substantially by means of training and education? Free will and predestination, like nature and nurture, is merely a convenient way to refer to one of the most basic puzzles of human existence.

⁶ “Basic assumptions” are used here in a broader sense than regulating concepts. For a description and telling critique of the assumptions of the contemporary world, see Tage Lindbom, *Tares and the Good Grain* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988). On another level these assumptions are challenged by S. H. Nasr’s *Knowledge and the Sacred*, op. cit.

⁷ Lord Northbourne, *Looking Back on Progress* Lahore, Suhail Academy, 1983, 47.

⁸ On the traditional conception of man, see G. Eaton, *King of the Castle*, Islamic Texts Society, 1993; “Man” in *Islamic Spirituality*, ed. S. H. Nasr, vol. I (New York: Crossroad, 1987, 358-377; Kathleen Raine, *What is Man?* (England: Golgonzoza Press, 1980; S. H. Nasr, “Who is Man...”, in *The Sword of Gnosis*, ed. Needleman (England: Penguin, n.d.), 203-217; S. H. Nasr (ed.) *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* (New York: Amity House, 1986, 385-403.

⁹ S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, op. cit., 161-162.

¹⁰ We have conciously avoided to comment on evolutionism and evolutionists positions though all these debates have a direct relevance to the disfiguration of the image of man. It could have taken us too far from our subject. A separate review may be in order on an other occasion.

¹¹ Called by the Hindus the Self, by the Buddhists the Buddha-nature, by the Jews Adam Kadmon, by the Christians Jesus the Christ, by Blake the ‘Divine Humanity’ etc.

¹² This is a specifically Islamic image, since Islam sees the cardinal sin of man in his forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) of who he is although he still carries his primordial nature (al-fitrah) within himself, the man as such to which infact the Islamic message addresses itself. See F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, pp. 13-15.

¹³ The whole course of European art, with it increasingly accelerated phases of action and reaction, is mainly a dialogue between man and his image. Islam banished all this ambiguous play of psychological mirrors at an early stage, thus preserving the primordial dignity of man himself.

¹⁴ Of special importance in this regard is René Guenon's *Man and his Becoming According to the Vedanta* (Delhi: 1990), which presents the concept of man in Hindu terminology, which, nevertheless, is shared by the other traditions as well. Also see his *The Great Triad, Quinta Essentia*, 1991, pp. 65-81 for an exposition of the concept of man from the point of view of the Far Eastern traditions. For a representative sampling of the Hindu view of the human self see the following extract:

“The Hindu doctrine of the human self postulates that the human self is a layered entity.... First and most obviously, we have bodies. Next comes the conscious layer of our minds. Underlying these two is a third region, the realm of the individual subconscious. This has been built up through our individual histories. Most of our past experiences have been lost to our conscious memory, but those experiences continue to shape our lives in ways that contemporary psychoanalysis tries to understand. With these three parts of the self, the West is in full agreement. What is distinctive in the Hindu hypothesis is its postulation of a fourth component. Underlying the other three, less perceived by the conscious mind than even its private subconscious (though related to it fully as much), stands Being Itself, infinite, unthwarted, eternal. “I am smaller than the minutest atom, likewise greater than the greatest. I am the whole, the diversified-multicolored-lovely strange universe. I am the Ancient One. I am Man, the Lord. I am the Being-of-Gold. I am the very state of divine beatitude.”...if only we could dredge up portions of our individual unconscious-the third layer of our being-we would experience a remarkable expansion of our powers, a vivid freshening of life. But if we could uncover something forgotten not only by ourselves but by humanity as a whole, something that provides clues not simply to our individual personalities and quirks but to all life and all existence, what then? Would this not be momentous? (Huston Smith, *The World Religions*, pp. 42-43).

¹⁵ Psalm 103:14

¹⁶ Job 4:19

¹⁷ Psalm 90:6

¹⁸ Psalm 90:9

¹⁹ Psalm 8:4

²⁰ Ecclesiastes 3:18-19. Considering the freedom of Israel's thought and her refusal to repress doubts when she felt them, it is not surprising to find that there were moments such as this.

²¹ Psalm 8:5

²² The number of the Hebrew word *'elohim*, is indeterminate.

²³ Job 25:6

²⁴ Psalm 8:6

²⁵ Psalm 51:5. It is totally false to claim this verse for the defense of either the doctrine of total human depravity or the notion that sex is evil. These are both imported notions that have nothing to do with Judaism.

²⁶ The word sin comes from a root meaning “to miss the mark,” and this people (despite their high origin) manage continually to do.

²⁷ Yet never in these “missings” is the misstep required. Jews have never

questioned human freedom. The first recorded human act involved free choice. In eating Eden's forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were, it is true, seduced by the snake, but they could have resisted. The snake merely tempted them; it is clearly a story of a human lapse. Inanimate objects cannot be other than they are; they do what nature and circumstance decree.

²⁸ Isaiah 1:16-17

²⁹ Deuteronomy 30:19

³⁰ *It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.
How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender (Hosea 11:3-4,8)*

³¹ S. H. Nasr, "Man, Pontifical and Promethean", in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, pp. 160-188; G. Durand, *On the Disfiguration of the Image of Man in the West*, Ipswich, U.K., 1976.

³² Job (7:17)

³³ St. Paul quotes this psalm in his Epistle to the Hebrews, in order to present to the Jews, familiar with the scriptures, the new concept of Jesus as the divine humanity incarnate.

³⁴ The King James Version translates it as follows: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels". That last word, we are told by Prof. Huston Smith, is a straight mistranslation, for the original Hebrew plainly reads "a little lower than the gods [or God]. See note 22.

³⁵ Genesis 1:27

³⁶ The Biblical expression says "in the image of God". In the Islamic tradition it appears in the following Hadith report "*khalaq Allahu 'l-adama 'ala suratibi*". See Bukhari, *Al-Sahih*, "Istidhan", 1; Muslim, *Al-Sahih*, "Birr", 115, "Jannah", 28; Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. II, 244, 251, 315, 323. Also see Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, n.d., Vol. II, p. 124, p. 490. For an illuminating exposition of the the implications of the statement in terms of the Divine Attributes see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2000, p. 120.

³⁷ Qur'an, 2:31.

³⁸ Genesis also tells us that God brought His creatures to Adam to see what he would name them (II:19).

³⁹ Bees can tell their hive-mates exactly where to find the best honey, but they don't know much about vinegar. Monarch butterflies know the precise location of their valley in Mexico, but they cannot be trusted to take you to New York City.

⁴⁰ Qur'an 24:55

⁴¹ *Al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*, I, p. 263.

⁴² Qur'an 7:172

⁴³ *Al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*, I, pp. 362, 367.

⁴⁴ *Al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*, II, p. 562.

⁴⁵ For a detailed exposition of Ibn 'Arabi's views see W. C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge, Self-Disclosure of God*.

⁴⁶ One can point out parallels in other religions. For traditional Jews, the Torah, in its widest sense, plays the same sort of role; and for traditional Christians, it is Jesus, the Word made flesh, who is the all-pervasive reality of the tradition.

⁴⁷ Our infancy has passed, and our old age has not yet arrived. It is difficult to imagine that the infant and the decrepit old man are the same in any real sense, but they are— in some way that is difficult to formulate. But where, you might wonder, in the midst of this (hopefully) long lifetime is the real you? In fact, an embodiment of the real you is found at every point on the trajectory of life, but the real you itself remains a mystery that correlates with the divine spirit, about which the Qur'an says:

They will ask you about the Spirit. Say., "The spirit is at the command of my Lord, and of knowledge you are given but little." (17:85)

⁴⁸ Qur'an 6:125

⁴⁹ To understand the Islamic view of Muhammad, we have to begin by looking at him in the light of incomparability (*tanzih*) the fact that God is real and everything other than God is unreal. From this perspective, all good belongs to God. Muhammad is other than God and hence, like all other created things, he is nothing compared to God. In human terms, Muhammad is a mortal like everyone else.

But there is still a major difference between the Prophet and other people. First, the Prophet is God's perfect servant. Everything in the universe is God's servant, but human beings, having carried the Trust, have to choose freely to be God's servant in order to live up to their potential. This free submission of self to God is the outstanding quality of Muhammad's character. Hence the Qur'an refers to him as "God's servant" and the Muslim consciousness pays this title the highest respect. But this is not the whole story of Muhammad. As God's perfect servant, he is also God's perfect vicegerent. Having fully actualized *tanzih*, he also embodies *tashbih*. The Qur'an illustrates these two sides of Muhammad's humanity in the verse, "Say: 'I am but a mortal like you; it has been revealed to me that your God is one God'" (18:110,41:6). Many commentators in modern times have paid attention only to the first half of this verse and ignored the implications of the second half.

⁵⁰ "Verily," concludes the verse of the Trust, the human being is "very ignorant, a great wrongdoer" (33:72).

⁵¹ He has done so— with God's guidance, of course— such that God has chosen him to be a mercy for the whole world: "We have not sent thee save as a mercy to all the world's inhabitants" (21:107). The second half of the previous verse "It has been revealed to me that your God is one God"- is all important, because it shows that Muhammad is the recipient of revelation. If there was any thought that he is just as imperfect as the rest of us, this thought is removed by the statement that he alone was chosen to receive the Qur'an .

⁵² For an excellent narrative of the account of Adam's creation and fall with all Qur'anic references see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2000, p. 92-3, 120-21, 134-44.

⁵³ A good deal of evidence could be cited from the Qur'an and the Hadith to prove human superiority. The prostration of the angels before Adam is a point at hand. The Prophet is reported to have said, "*On the day of resurrection, no one will be greater than the children of Adam.*" *The people wondered at this and someone asked, "O Messenger of God! Not even the angels?"* He replied, "*Not even the angels. They are compelled like the sun and the moon.*" The angels have no freedom of action. They could not

disobey God if they wanted to. Hence, they can be only what they are. But human beings can overcome their own limitations and move from distance (*tanzih*) to nearness (*tashbih*), from servanthood to vicegerency. Another hadith makes a similar point: “God created the angels from intelligence, the beasts from appetite, and human beings from both intelligence and appetite. When a person’s intelligence overcomes his appetite, he is higher than the angels, but when his appetite overcomes his intelligence, he is lower than the beasts.”

⁵⁴ On the four significations of the word *islam* see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2000, p. 4-7.

⁵⁵ Qur’an, 7:172

⁵⁶ It needs to be stressed that this intuitive knowledge of all human beings is the knowledge of *tawhid*, not the knowledge of the *shari’ah*, “right way and open road” that is specific to the prophetic teachings of Islam. In other words, it pertains to the domain of the first *Shabadah*, not to that of the second *Shabadah*, which embraces specific instructions brought by the prophets. The first *Shabadah* is known by everyone, although they usually have to be reminded about it. In contrast, the truths embraced by the domain of the second *Shabadah* have to be learned through a divine message.

⁵⁷ Qur’an, 7:173

⁵⁸ the *al-fana* and *al-baqa* of Sufism.

⁵⁹ Likewise, the Quran speaks of man’s pre eternal (*azali*) covenant with God when he answered God’s call, “Am I not your Lord?” with the affirmative, “Yea,” the “Am I not your Lord?” (*alastu birabbikum*) symbolizing the relation between God and man before creation and so becoming a constantly repeated refrain for all those sages in Islam who have hearkened man to his eternal reality in divines by reminding him of the *asrar-i alast* or the mysteries of this pre-eternal covenant. This reminding or unveiling, moreover, has always involved the doctrine of the elaboration of man through various states of being.

The genesis of man and his prenatal existence in various higher states of existence is expounded in great detail in Jewish esoterism too. See L. Schaya, “La genese de l’homme” *Etude Traditionnelles*, no 456-57 (Avril-Septembre 1977): 94-131, where he discusses the birth, descent, loss of original purity, and the regaining of man’s original state according to Jewish sources concluding that, “Ne de Dieu, letre humain estdestine, après see multiples naissances et morts, a renaitre en Lui, en tant que Lui” (p. 131); and idem, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, pp. 116ff. see also F. Warrain, *La Teodicee de la Kabbale*, Paris, 1949, pp. 73ff.; and G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem, 1941, lectures 6 and 7.

⁶⁰ Qur’an, 2: 31

⁶¹ Genesis, II:19

⁶² One of the element is the excessive seperation between man as the seat of consciousness or the I and the cosmos as the “non-I” or a domain of the reality from which man is alienated. This attitude was not unrelated to the excessive seperation of the spirit from the flesh in the official Christian theology even if this chasm was filled by the Hermetic tradition, especially its alchemical aspect, and affected even the daily life of the medieval community through the craft guilds. The “angelism” of medieval theology, although containing a profound truth, considered only one aspect of the traditional *anthropos*, allowing the rebellion afianst such a view by those who thought that in order to discover the spiritual significance of nature and the positive significance of the body, they had to deny

the medieval concept of man. The Renaissance cult of the body, even if by some freak of history it had manifested itself in India, could not have been opposed to Hinduism in the way that it was opposed to Christianity in the West.

⁶³ The mitigating circumstances in such cases—for they are always present, at any rate for every new fall, the order then existing shows a maximum of abuse and corruption, so that the temptation to prefer an apparently clean error to an outwardly soiled truth is particularly strong.

⁶⁴ Christian art continues to remind of the celestial hierarchies of angels, of the lives of saints lived in accordance with the laws not of nature but of the spirit; of the Christian myth of the birth of the divine principle into the world of generation.

⁶⁵ Qur'an 50:22