# ISLAM

# THE ALTERNATIVE

MURAD HOFMANN

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# ISLAM: THE ALTERNATIVE

(second enlarged edition)

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# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In 1991, while I was in the lush Moroccan oasis of Taroudant, just south of the High Atlas mountains, the idea suddenly struck me that Francis Fukuyama's notion of the imminent 'end of history'[1] was crying out for a strong reply—historically sound, scientifically honest, problem-conscious, and free from apologetics—a reply pointing out that there *is* an alternative to cultural monotony: Islam—not only as a viable option, but as the only alternative to an Occident that is increasingly troubled by social and ideological crises. Two months later, this book was ready.

The idea that, following the collapse of communism, the world was to become one-dimensional impressed me as misguided triumphalism, as a misjudgment typical of what 'Third World' people denounce as cultural imperialism: the eager expectation that sooner or later—rather sooner than later—the 'project of modernity' (profanely known as the 'American Way of Life') was to become the obligatory model for all other societies around the globe—as if there was no alternative left. Not much later, Samuel Huntington enlarged on this naive idea by implying more concretely that the Muslim world was bound to disappear or to become fully marginalized[2] —a prejudice traceable back to European thinking of the Age of Reason, if not before then, to the infamous era of the Crusades.

Since the 18th century, European man, in his arrogance, convinced himself that he was the measure of everything, and that his superb rationality would assure him the highest peaks of knowledge, power, and happiness ever achieved in human history. This is quite amazing. Although in this century unspeakable atrocities were committed by this 'rational man'—two savage world wars (including the use of atomic weapons in

1. Originally an essay, his concept was later developed into a book:*The End of History and the Last Man*, N.Y., NY, 1993.

2. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72/3 (Summer 1993):22-49; the same *Noch ist der Westen Nicht Verloren* (The West is not yet lost), interview with "Die Welt," Hamburg 28:129 June 1997; for other reactions see Ahmet Davotoglu, *The Clash of Interest: An Explanation of World (Dis)order*, "Intellectual Discourse," Istanbul 1994, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 107–130; Richard Falk, "False Universalism and the Geopolitics of Exclusion: The Case of Islam," *Third World Quarterly*, 1997, vol. 18, no. 1.

the second), the holocaust, Stalinism, and 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia—such bestialities were not enough to shake his conviction. Quite to the contrary, Western man remains convinced that his civilization is the ultimate one, deserving universal dominance. *His* international law, *his* charter of human rights, *his* economic system, *his* supposedly 'value-free' scientific approach, *his* philosophical epistemology, *his* agnosticism and atheism are all regarded by him as essential ingredients of an emerging world culture—'Made in the USA'. In a 'brave new global village' eating habits, fashion, male and female ideals of beauty, the management of leisure, sexual mores, architecture, music—you name it—are all to ape the Western model. What will be left will be the West—and the (insignificant) rest.

And yet, there is an alternative to the Western paradigm, and that is Islam. True, this religion and its civilization is hardly ever presented by Western media as a valid alternative that can cope with the world's problems as it enters the 21st century. In fact, Western audiences are bombarded by material presenting Islam as backward, even irrational and aggressive (if not downright terrorist). To counter these false representations, I isolated 20 major prejudices against Islam and devoted a chapter to each of them.

When the German version of *Islam: The Alternative*[3] first appeared in Munich, it caused a media scandal and was soon debated even in the Bundestag, the German parliament. But no case could be made against me, and I remained the German ambassador in Rabat until retirement. However, it became evident that defending Islam after the Salman Rushdie affair and the second Gulf War was no longer 'politically correct'. When the English translation of *Islam: The Alternative* first appeared in Great Britain in 1993, some owners even hesitated to display it in their bookshops.[4] Also—how ironic!—its Arabic version,[5] while popular in Egypt, the Lebanon, and Syria, encountered a bit of disfavor in some of the other Muslim countries—perhaps because of its critical approach to what I consider deviations inside the Muslim world.

Of course, this book was mainly written with the postindustrial and postmodern Western world in mind where in the coming century, without

3. *Der Islam als Alternative*. Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Munich 1992, 2nd edit. 1993, 3rd edit. 1995.

4. Garnet Publishing Ltd., Reading, UK, 1993.

5. *Al Islam ka Badil*. Munich 1993, 2nd edit. Cairo 1997.

a doubt, Islam will become the most vital religion. Not only that; I expect Islam, in the Muslim world itself, to derive major benefits from the experiences and achievements of Muslims in the West, both emigrants and converts. In view of this, American Muslims face three principle tasks (i) to transmit their religion fully intact to the next generation (in a society which is largely permissive and consumerist); (ii) to demonstrate to the American public the spiritual as well as the democratic potential of Islam, showing that this religion is relevant for the solution of most, if not all, of contemporary society's woes, especially as the only effective antidote to drug addiction and to the 'cooling' of interpersonal relations; and finally (iii) to help rejuvenate and refocus the Islamic world at large, particularly through unhampered Islamic scholarship that concentrates on the essentials of our faith, as well as through the transfer of technological and administrative competence from the Occident to the Orient.

Murad Wilfried Hofmann
Istanbul, August 1997

# Preface to the First Edition

Following the recent tragic events in the Muslim world, bookshops have been flooded by works on the subject of Islam.

On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that only very few authors are willing or indeed able to write about the spiritual background to the cultural phenomenon of 'Islam'. Driven by the fear of radical fundamentalism, 'integrism', a 'Holy War' and the 'Sword of Islam' evoked in a number of titles, many readers are satisfied with superficial socio-political commentaries.

But it is impossible to have any understanding, even an idea of the dynamics and the capacity for devotion of contemporary Muslims without a knowledge of their convictions, of the world religion of Islam and its spirituality.

This book, written by a German Muslim, describes the beliefs and civilization of Islam in twenty chapters, each one corresponding to a controversial issue.

It is a scientific plea for Islam, supported by history and conscious of the problems, but free from apologetics.

For as long as the Western world and Communism were opposed to each other, Islam could be regarded as a 'third way', an option between the two philosophies. But today it sees itself as an alternative way of coping with life in a world dualistic once more. Far-sighted observers regard it as almost inevitable that Islam will become the dominant world religion in the twenty-first century, God willing. The reason for this, is suggested in the title of this book. Not only does Islam see itself as the alternative to post-industrial Western society. It is the alternative.

Murad Wilfried Hofmann
Rabat, Ramaḍan 1412 / March, 1992

# FOREWORD

"We hate what we do nót know." This statement is attributed to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, fourth Caliph of Islam, first Imām of the Shi'ah, and cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad.

Ignorance certainly does breed hatred and fear in relations between humans as well as States, as may be observed throughout history . Today, we find populist publications or TV programs offering to inform the public on little-known subjects; however, this is not the answer and is often times dangerous. The reporter often places too great an emphasis on those points which specifically interest him at the cost of other, equally important facts. A false picture of a culture may thus be painted, triggering what might be termed 'intellectual allergies'.

This is all the more true when it comes to the subject of religion; and Islam typically suffers from misinterpretations of this kind. Just as nineteenth-century artists liked to paint pictures of Muslims (not 'Muhammadans') as savage warriors, with swords in their hands, or in sultry harems, today the word 'Islam' frequently evokes the image of a fanatical bearded oriental scholar, or ruthless terrorist. Images and ideas of this kind are based on misinterpretations which those who have studied Islamic culture or have lived amongst Muslims are in a position to correct.

It is understandable that Islam, a religion born after Christianity, could be regarded as a heresy by medieval European Christians (this is the origin of the old myth that the Prophet Muhammad was a renegade Cardinal!) who saw in this unknown religion similarities to ancient paganism (hence, the strange images of Muhammad depicted in the form of golden icons or statues, found even in the poetry of German Romantics)—an odd distortion of a religion, which has at its center the absolute belief in the unity of God, and whose Prophet, Muhammad (c. 570–632), only described himself as a man to whom revelations were made.

After the death of the Prophet, the rapidly growing Muslim community enjoyed numerous political successes, giving rise to fears amongst

Westerners of the political and military superiority of the Muslims: in the West, they crossed the Straits of Gibraltar in 711, founding the flourishing Andalusian 'Moorish' culture; in the same year they reached Transoxania, laying the foundations for the rich and varied manifestations of Islam in Central Asia; and again in the same year they reached the lower Indus and incorporated the area which now forms Southern Pakistan into the Caliph's Empire.

Spain soon became a relay station between Europe and the Islamic world. To this day numerous scientific, medical, astronomical and cultural terms bear witness to the influence of the sophisticated Muslim culture of Andalusia, where Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived side by side in harmony and mutual influence, the likes of which would never be seen again.

It was in Spain that the first translation of the Qur'an was attempted: this Latin rendering of 1143 remained definitive for centuries and was printed in Basel in 1543 at Luther's suggestion. Until modern times translations of the Holy Book have always been accompanied by translators' apologia. Of course, the Qur'an, revealed between 610 and 622 in Makkah and then Madinah, poses almost insurmountable problems for the translator. For the Muslim it is the word of God, revealed in clear Arabic, and its translation can only be superficial, for who can render the unsurpassable beauty of the Word of God in another language? The many subtleties and overtones which accompany every Arabic word in the Qur'an make any translation from the Arabic extremely difficult. No translation can reproduce the spirit as well as the written form, and this itself leads to difficulties in understanding it. In addition, the arrangement of the Qur'an compounds the difficulty for the non-Muslim. (The present arrangement dates back to the third Caliph, 'Uthman.) The 114 chapters (*surahs*) are not arranged chronologically, but generally in decreasing order of length. Beginning with the opening chapter, the *Fātiḥah,* (an opening prayer), the Qur'an progresses from the largest chapters to the smallest ones, and concludes with two chapters for 'seeking refuge with God'. But, because the short surahs belong to the earliest period of the preaching while the long ones frequently come from the later period (when Muhammad was concerned with the establishment of the community in Madinah), it is not easy for the new reader to find his way through the Holy Book. There is a danger that sentences may be read out of context, leading to false conclusions.

The non-Muslim is scarcely aware of the extent to which the Qur'an permeates the Islamic languages, that it has given them the Arabic alphabet, or how far it has influenced their verbal imagery. For the most part, the Islamic sciences grew out of the study of the Qur'an and the arts, such as calligraphy and modulating recitation, developed in order to give the Word of God worthy form. Classical works in the languages of the Islamic world—whether they be in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, or any other language spoken by Muslims—can hardly be understood without a thorough knowledge of the Qur'anic vocabulary.

For the Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God 'made book,' just as for the Christian, Christ is the Word of God 'made flesh'. Muhammad is the vessel into which this word was transmitted to the world; and just as the Qur'an has been misunderstood for centuries, the figure of Muhammad has also been misinterpreted. For the Muslim faithful, he represents the shining, ideal example for every situation in life—his sunnah (his conduct) is the accepted model. But the fact that Muhammad was a prophet and teacher who did not withdraw from the world, but was a man with a family (the marriages he concluded in his later years were disliked particularly by the ascetic medieval Christian Church) and that, in the years following his emigration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madinah in 622, he organized a State, seemed irreconcilable with the ideal of a holy man. But for the Muslim this very duality, the combination of religion and worldly activity, is the sign of a true religious leader (hence, the endless discussions on the nature of an 'Islamic' State).

And just as over the centuries the Qur'an has again and again been and is still being interpreted afresh by scholars, mystics, and devotees, more and more legends have been woven around the figure of Muhammad. The man who always emphasized his mere humanity (in mystical interpretations) has been likened to a shining light, the first being created by God, the real purpose and aim of creation, and (in modern secular interpretations) an ideal social reformer.

Historically and geographically, Islam is extraordinarily wide-ranging; however, the many local variations of Islam—in Indonesia, for example, or Black Africa—should not surprise us. After all, there are also many different forms of Christianity, ranging from the colorful iconostasis of the Greek Orthodox Church to the bare House of God of the Calvinists, from Irish Catholicism to the strictness of the Methodists.

Despite the variations in the local colorings of Islam, the common basis is one and the same: the creed that God is One, without companions, uncreated, reigning from eternity to eternity and that Muhammad is His Messenger. The first half of the Islamic creed is "There is no divinity except God". The worst sin is to suggest that he had a companion. The second half of the creed attests to the fact that "Muhammad is God's Messenger". This means that he, the last in a long line of Prophets that began with Adam, transmitted God's final revelation, once again clearly delivering God's eternal law.

We must bear these simple facts in mind, never forgetting that Islam, whose name means 'submission to God,' places God and his Word at the center of life. Many of the misunderstandings we encounter today arise from our tendency to view everything from the perspective of the ideals of late twentieth-century Western society. This is where the real difficulty lies: can we accept values of a pretty much 'godless' society as absolute? Our grandmothers' generation would probably have been shocked by many things that we now regard as normal, permissible aspects of everyday life. Do we, for example, still go to church with heads covered, as we once did? Covering the hair is an ancient tradition; according to early beliefs, hair is endowed with great power. (We all know the story of Samson, who lost his strength when his locks were cut off.) Since the earliest times Jewish societies covered the head. The devout Jewess covers her hair, and the devout Jewish male student or professor even attends lectures at Harvard with his Yarmulka or skull cap—why then should a Turkish girl not wear a headscarf? The Islamic religion, however, requires a head-covering *only* during periods of prayer or Qur'anic teaching, and not at any other time.[1] Women and men alike are called to perform all religious duties, and the Qur'an constantly refers to 'devout Muslim men *and* women'.

"We hate what we do not know," but when we trace the roots of a foreign culture much is clarified. We learn, for example, that the frequently employed term 'holy war' is an expression which stems from the Christian language of the crusades; the Arabic term, jihad, means 'to strive, to endeavor'—the believer should 'strive along the path of God,' i.e., defend his belief and, when necessary, help spread the religion. In addition, jihad refers to an inner struggle against one's own weaknesses.

1. This view does not correspond to orthodox Islamic doctrine; see pp. 125-128 below.

We could go through the time-consuming process of examining a long list of similar misunderstandings; therefore, let us be grateful that in this work a German Muslim, trained in law and philosophy, offers the reader his own interpretations. To a great extent Dr. Hofmann's analysis of the ideal Sunni Islam coincides with the teachings of the late Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman who was persecuted by the ultra-orthodox scholars of Pakistan for preaching 'the living Sunnah'. He focused on the spirit of the Prophet's example, and his analyses (which also included a rejection of Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism) were of major importance. Dr. Hofmann also found a similar concern for a reinterpretation of Islam on the basis of the Qur'an in the Indo-Muslim poet-philosopher Iqbal. He emphasized the idea of the Qur'an being inexhaustible in all its facets, but also taught of man's duties to improve his world and develop his God-given talents. This includes the rejection of what is often referred to as Islamic fatalism, an attitude regarded by many to be the cause of Islam's stagnation. Dr Hofmann's comments on this subject seem to be particularly important. An absolute trust in God, which is a feature of Islam, does not exclude the possibility of human striving; rather, it helps the devout Muslim to bear whatever fate comes to him—he trusts that God knows what is best for him at any one point in time. The Prophet said, "This world is the field (that yields its fruits) for the next (world)." Every action carries within it its own fruit. Islamic fatalism does not prevent Muslims from acting; rather, it teaches that every event, even suffering, has a meaning. Anyone who has seen a devout Turkish mother receive news of the death of her tenth and last son, and still be in a position to console her weeping friends, will know what I mean.

Of course, for modern Western society this kind of attitude is alien, even incomprehensible, despite the fact that it is very close to early Christianity: it is an attitude of complete trust in God, whose names include the Creator, the Preserver, and the Judge, and whose most frequently used names are the Beneficent and the Merciful (every surah of the Qur'an and every activity begins with the phrase "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful").

The tendency to identify contemporary Islam with terrorism or fundamentalism (again, a term taken from the American history of religion) is tragic, although to some extent understandable, since it is those manifestations of another religion which are most alien to our own understanding of religion which always attract the most attention, and because moderate

groups never have a high profile. But do we identify Christianity with terrorism every time we hear of attacks in various European countries? It sometimes seems to me that the fear of the Turks, who were able to reach Vienna on two occasions—in 1529 and 1683—still lives on beneath the surface in central Europe, coloring many people's view of the religion of the Turks and Arabs, Persians and Muslims in the Indo-Indonesian world. Even educated people know little of the rich treasures of Islamic literature and art, and seldom realize that the Alhambra in Granada or the much praised Taj Mahal in India are the works of Muslim architects. And how many people know that Islam honors Jesus and his Virgin Mother? The Muslim regards Jesus as the last Prophet sent by God before Muhammad, as a man who preached love of God and asceticism. However, he believes that Jesus was not crucified, rather, that he was raised up to Heaven.

In this book, the reader will find many new or for him unknown interpretations. At times he may be amazed, if not shocked by the author's sharply defined position, which is based firmly on classical Islam and which does not prize the Islamic mysticism which is more kindred to many Westerners. The reader will find Islam, which many Westerners see as a relic of outdated medieval forms, presented as a religion very much alive and worth living, and, we hope, will gain a deeper understanding of this faith.

Finally, we should not forget Goethe's dictum to be found in his *West-Eastern Divan,* a work which testifies to his great insight into the spiritual world of Islam:

If Islam means submission to God's Will
Then in Islam we all live and die.

Annemarie Schimmel
Advent 1991

# ISLAM AND THE WEST

Towards the end of his life the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) sent messages to surrounding rulers, such as the Negus of Abyssinia, Khosrow II of Persia (590–628) and the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius (610–641). Muhammad called upon them in simple and unambiguous terms to accept Islam for their own benefit and the benefit of their peoples.[1]

This episode in diplomatic history marks the beginning of relations between Islam and the West—never broken off, nor ever relaxed, for 1400 years—relations which, despite many fruitful economic and intellectual contacts, have always been confrontational.

It is for this reason, against the background of the historical Christian–Islamic conflict, that today West and East, Occident and Orient are usually regarded not as complementary but conflicting, even hostile worlds, facing each other fearfully and without comprehension. The collective memory of both parties is wide awake.

The course of history, particularly the speed and extent of early Islamic expansion, explains a great deal: hardly had Muhammad died (632) before Syria and Palestine (634–35), Persia (637), Egypt (643–649), Armenia (652), Cyprus (653), the Maghrib (670) and even Spain (711) became Islamic. Constantinople suffered its first siege as early as 688. On this occasion, in the figure of Abu Ayub al Ansari, the flag-bearer, one of the Prophet's companions was still present.

In view of successes like these it is understandable that the West should cling to the notion that Islam is an aggressive religion that owes its expansion to 'the fire and the sword'. It is true that from a military point of view the surrounding Christian and Iranian areas were unable to oppose the fearless religious fervor of the early Muslims. But it is also true that the

1. See Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām, *The Life of Muhammad*, translated by A. Guillaume, Oxford 1955, pp. 652ff. The message to Heraclius transmitted by Dihya b. Khalifa al Kalbi al Khazraji was explained to the Emperor at his request by Abu Sufyan. See hadith no. 4553 in *Ṣaḥīḥ al Bukhārī*, translated into German by Muh. Rassoul, Cologne 1989, pp. 436-438, and into English by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Saḥīḥ al Bukhārī*, vol. VI, Chicago, IL, 1979, hadith no. 60175 (*Tafsīr al Qur'an*).

small number of early Muslim warriors would have been unable to conquer such large areas, had the population not joined them en masse.

Certainly, one of the reasons for this is not exactly flattering to the West: heterodox Christians in the Maghrib and Mashriq—including Arians and Donatists—accepted Islamic rule easily because they too did not believe in either the divine nature of Jesus nor the Trinity.[2] In the eleventh century, Islam spread to Senegal, Mali, Ghana and Chad without the aid of either fire or sword and is still spreading peacefully throughout Africa today.

The world-shattering dynamism of the Muslims deeply affected the scientific and cultural worlds of the time. They achieved epoch-making results in all areas of the arts and sciences—including mathematics, optics, botany, surgery, ophthalmology, hygiene, lexicography, history, sociology—and in the continuation of Aristotelian philosophy, which had been forgotten in the West. In these and other areas, Islamic civilization outshone Western civilization from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries, even if we only take into account the likes of al Razi (Rhazes), al Biruni, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battutah and al Khwarizmi.[3] When the Muslims were finally halted, as in France in 733, the Western world launched its counter-attack with crusades (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) and the Portuguese–Spanish Reconquista. (The Byzantine Christians soon learned the meaning of Christian 'fire and sword' with the Latins' (or "Franks'") sacking of Constantinople in 1204.) And then it was again the West's turn to be afraid, following the Ottomans' capture of Constantinople (1453) and the advance of their armies through the Balkans as far as Vienna (1529 and 1683).

Since the eighteenth century it seemed as though these epic conflicts gradually would come to an end. From that time until the present the two worlds drifted apart in a dramatic manner. Since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the West has undergone an almost explosive scientific and technological development, giving rise to an enormous economic and

2. At his first encounter with Muslims in 614, the Negus of Abyssinia saw no contradiction between his and their comprehension of Jesus and Mary; see Ibn Isḥāq, *op. cit.*, pp. 146ff; Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, New York 1983, pp. 81ff.

3. Since Sigrid Hunke's bestseller *Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland* (Stuttgart, 1960) these facts should be common knowledge; see also *Das Vermächtnis des Islams*, 2 vols, Munich 1983; Muh. Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 5th edition, Luton 1980, pp. 443–477; *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Leiden, 1992.

military dynamism unmatched in the rest of the world, and which is still seen as proof of a general superiority of the Christian civilization.

At the same time, the Islamic world declined into a state of such incompetence, lethargy, and decadence that colonization by the imperialistic Western powers of the nineteenth century was inevitable. In 1924, it was not unrealistic to believe that Atatürk had dealt Islam its death blow with the abolition of the Caliphate.

Thus, from the middle of this century onwards, it seemed only a matter of time before Western culture would become the 'obligatory example' (Theodore von Laue), the world culture, implying the westernization of all other cultures. From Seoul to Soho future people world-wide would wear jeans, eat hamburgers, drink Coca Cola, smoke Marlboro, speak English, watch CNN, live in a Bauhaus style house in a democratic State and probably be *pro forma* members of some Christian Church.

Today, the causes of the demise of the Islamic world are still under discussion.[4] In my opinion there are three main contributing factors.

First, in the thirteenth century the Christian world and the Mongols, almost simultaneously, 'put the screws on' Islam, militarily speaking, hitting a major nerve as both centers of Islamic intellectual culture were overrun—Cordoba in 1236, Baghdad in 1258. To this day the Islamic world has not recovered from these catastrophes.

Second, in the fourteenth century the idea became fixed in Islamic jurisprudence and soon after within the general community, that everything worth knowing had already been known and was better understood by earlier generations closer to the source. This led to scholarship being based on imitation (*taqlid*), a general un-Islamic stagnation in intellectual life and a neglect of natural sciences (see also the chapter "Religion and Knowledge").

Third, the last and by far the most important factor is to be found not within the Islamic world but within the Western world: it cannot be denied that its huge material boom from the nineteenth century onwards was inextricably linked to a gradual break with the Christian faith. Indeed, the motivating force behind the scientifically and economically successful scientism and positivism of this 'century without God'[5] was a world-centered attitude, if not always atheism, then an agnosticism of

4. See Peter Waltner,'Warum ist die islamische Welt unterentwickelt?', *CIBEDO*, Frankfurt 1988, no. 6, pp. 161–173; Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. III, Chicago, 1974, p. 238.

5. The title of a book by Alfred Müller-Armack which appeared in 1948.

which Feuerbach, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud were the apostles. Since then, scientific rationalism, which only admits the validity of quantifiable sensory perception, has become the dominant Occidental ideology of efficiency. Belief in God is perhaps tolerated as a probability theory à la Swinburn,[6] but anything to do with ultimate issues becomes taboo, thanks to a 'magic of death repression' (W. Freund).

In the twentieth century even the masses carry these ideas. As a result of the subjectivism and relativism they have acquired, they live a vulgar *de facto* atheism whose idols are power, money, beauty, popularity and sex. It was accepted that science, as opposed to the religion it had repressed, was incompetent for determining the meaning of life, yet it was thought that this issue would simply disappear together with the irrational Christian beliefs that had fathered it.[7]

This loss of transcendence, this vulgar materialism found in both the East and the West, has led to the greedy hedonism of a people without constraints, who see their emotions as the measure of all things and who expect unending 'progress' to lead to a consumer paradise on earth.[8] This is where even "post-modern" industrial society is heading, a society whose highest principles continue to be of economic nature: growth, efficiency, full employment, profit maximization, specialization.

Alfred Müller-Armack described this logical process in his book *Religion und Wirtschaft* (Religion and Economy, 1959) in even fewer words:

> Because man has paid for his freedom to deny God with the compulsion to populate his world with idols and demons, the history of faith . . . is incomplete without the history of the lack of faith. God as the highest value is replaced by idols which . . . lead to a progressive loss of substance. The history of the perversion of faith, of pseudo-religion, is the history of destructive forces which lead to catastrophes. (p. xv)

Neither Islam, nor any other culture possessing a religious nature, could withstand the material power generated by an onslaught motivated in this

6. Richard Swinburn, *The Existence of God*, Oxford 1979.

7. In the words of Hans Oesterle, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 September 1987.

8. Described in greater detail by, amongst others, René Guénon, *Crisis of the Modern World*, 1981; Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, 1983; see also Vance Packard, *The Sexual Wilderness*, 1968, and Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, 1971.

hedonist way. For this reason—as regards the third main reason for Islamic 'backwardness'—it is erroneous to ask what has 'gone wrong' recently with the Muslim world; for, in fact, it is the Western world which has gone wrong![9]

Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, contrary to what one had grown to expect, *both* sides underwent momentous breaks in development. But Islam, though wracked with crises, was not buried. On the contrary, it has become reanimated to such an extent that ancient fears of Islam have been revived. And in contrast, crisis now looms in the Western industrial society.

This was unexpected at the time but today both developments are seen as inevitable.

Sociologists such as Daniel Bell (Harvard) have observed that the economic success of the capitalist world undermines the very values (and, therefore, the behavior) of the Max Weber-like Protestant ethic on which it is based. This self-destructive mechanism can be observed in the fact that in affluent societies virtues such as diligence, thrift, discipline, patience, brotherliness and courage are defamed and perverted so as to become negative qualities, or are replaced with new values and new codes of conduct, which are really 'post-industrial' to the extent that—generally practiced—they could not sustain an industrial society.[10]

Thus, individualism is perverted to narcissism, brotherliness to the para-rational collective behavior of groupies at rock concerts, self-determination ("My belly belongs to me") to moral anarchy, liberality to libertinage, tolerance to value-neutrality, competition to consumer madness, equality to leveling (instead of equal chances, equal results), sensitivity to whining, being careful to a refusal to take risks, respect to fear, eroticism to sexual athletics, diligence to workaholism, and flexibility to contempt for tradition. In short, as Marcel Boisot established in 1984, such perversions are inevitable when the key factors of rationality, freedom, and love are no longer held in balance. This is easily worked through: rationality without freedom leads to the 'Gulag Archipelago' and rationality without

9. This is why Muslims react so bitterly to the Orientalists' suggestion that Islam should finally make up its own 'Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment,' as if Islam had missed its train or should also slide down a slippery slope.

10. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, London 1976; see also Wolfgang Slim Freund, "Überlegungen zur Dialektik zwischen 'Rationalität' und 'magischem Denken' in westlichen Industriegesellschaften," in *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 1986, no. 3, pp. 47ff.

love to Auschwitz; freedom without love leads to the exploitation of others, freedom without rationality to self-destruction.[11]

The modern scene in all industrial States shows symptoms of dysfunction, symbolized by the 'green' dropout searching for alternatives to the very system which gave him wealth and freedom. Young people like this are manifesting something very fundamental through their specific problems, obsessions, or 'hang-ups': pervasive fear, the need for emotional security, malaise towards the secret compulsions of hypertrophic technology, resistance to 'consumer terror,' and rejection of the idolization of unmitigated rationality, whether in the economy or in nuclear deterrence.

In fact, they are demonstrating that one cannot take away man's transcendental links without subjecting him to a meaningless, boundless cultural 'freedom of the damned'.

Let us look at them, these victims of a seemingly value-agnostic society. They have everything—autonomy, protection from the cradle to the grave, sex without taboos, drugs on demand, a great deal of free time, lots of cash, and every human right imaginable. But what they feel is an existential emptiness, what they long for is warmth in society and a guru who radiates authority. And behind all this is an increasingly urgent quest for *meaning*.

This is the background to the sudden reappearance of religiosity as "a psycho boom with many sects and their extremely subjective contemplation of their navels" (Rosemarie Stein), which causes even established Churches to reflect upon their mystical potential. This trend toward the esoteric, toward the 'Jesus trip,' may follow strange paths. Sooner or later, as search for an alternative, for a valid religion, it encounters the phenomenon of Islam which is in the ascendant, and which is now understood as the third way between the utopia of Western and Eastern materialism.[12]

The corresponding development in the Islamic world began with the independence movements of this century that finally led to its political self-determination. (With Algeria [1962] being the last colonized Muslim state, except for Palestine, to regain its sovereignty.) Initially these young States and their heroes—Muhammad Ali Jinna, Gamal Abd al Nasser,

11. Marcel Boisot, "Eine moralische Waffe—Das westliche Wertesystem," in *Journal of the European Institute for Security* 3/84, Luxemburg; for similar views from a Muslim perspective see Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, "The Crisis of Modernity and Other Common Ground," *Al Ahram Weekly*, 12-23 July, 1997, p. 7.

12. For details see *Religion in Contemporary Europe*, ed. John Fulton and Peter Gee, Lewiston, NY, 1994; and *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, N.Y., NY, 1994.

Habib Bourgiba, Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumedienne—sought to copy Western models: liberalism, nationalism, socialism, communism. Islam played no specific or prominent role, since early Arabism was as unreligious as early Zionism. The Algerian FLN and the Tunisian Neo-Destour were secular at leadership level. This assimilation of the West, which continued after independence, corresponded at heart to the Kemalist doctrine and the ideals of westernized, modernistic Muslims, such as Muhammad Arkoun in France and Bassam Tibi in Germany.[13]

But all of these experiments failed due to the inability to cope with population growth, low exports, flight of capital, nepotism, corruption, debt, and the emigration of intellectuals, despite the fact that many attempts were made to solve problems together through the Arab League (1944), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (1969), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (1981) and the Union of the Maghrib States (UMA) (1989).

Against this background, at the beginning of the 1970s the phenomenon of re-Islamization arose, and has been relentlessly analyzed ever since, with its aspects of Islamism (*Islāmīyah*), fundamentalism and integrism, to which chapters of this book are dedicated.[14]

Initially, it was believed and hoped that re-Islamization was but a social protest movement. Seeing the revival of Islam simply as a function of the technological gap only proved that the analysts were unable to comprehend the religious factor. Clearly, they lacked an understanding of people who take their religion seriously, even in cases where the Islamic world was regarded benevolently through the eyes of third world romanticism (*tiers mondisme*).

Meanwhile, Bassam Tibi had shown that the term 're-Islamization' contained a false premise, because, except amongst some Western-oriented urban 'intellectuals,' Islam had never lost its significance anywhere as a belief and reference system, not even in Turkey, but had retained its relevance under a "thin veneer of modernization" (Arnold Hottinger).

Today, it is agreed that the renewed manifestation of Islam must be seen as the re-entry of the sacred into the public domain. (Gilles Kepel empha-

13. See Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival*, New Burnswick, NJ., 1996.

14. See Bassam Tibi, *Die Krise des modernen Islam*, Munich 1981; Wolfgang Slim Freund, reviewed in: *Islam und der Westen*, 1982, no. 3, p. 12, Freund, "Jüdischer und islamischer Fundamentalismus" in: *Orient* 1987, no. 2, pp. 216ff.; Detlef Khalid, "Die Entwicklungen im Islam," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28 April 1983; Peter Scholl-Latour, *Allah ist mit den Standhaften*, Stuttgart 1983; Wilhelm Dietl, *Heiliger Krieg für Allah*, Munich 1983; *The Islamist Dilemma—The Political Role of Islamist Movements in the Contemporary Arab World*, ed. Laura Guazzone, Reading, U.K., 1995.

sizes this in the title of his book *La revanche d'Allah.*) Logically, this translates into a fundamental rejection of Western secularism. The Islamic world regards the Western loss of, and break with, the transcendental as a mutilation of human faculties, reacting to it with a counter-project which does not herald the end of modernism as such but Eurocentrism. (After the demise of Communism the world is once again a bi-polar one, as far as the history of ideas is concerned.)

The revival of Islam also offers the traumatized Muslim of the Third World a chance to retrace his roots and to regain his sense of dignity by withdrawing from competition (which cannot be won anyway) with the West in the consumer sector. The apparently endless chain of humiliations of the Arab world, especially in Palestine, has prepared the political ground for a religious and moral revolt.

Of course there are 'Islamistic' forces in the Islamic world too, who use religion primarily to motivate and justify their political aim of changing the status quo, 'Islamic' terrorists being among them. In the context of the revolutionary Shi'ah seizure of power in Iran (1979) and the Gulf War (1990–91), such Muslims behaved in a manner "which damaged Islam more than anything else this century" (Wolfgang Günter Lerch).[15]

Indeed, as so often in their history, Occident and Orient once again are witnessing a scene of destruction. During the Gulf War, fear spread amongst Muslims in Europe and the USA, just as amongst Europeans in the Maghrib and the Near East. It seemed as if we were all waiting for new crusades, in both directions. There was no more talk of a Christian–Islamic dialogue (see the chapter "The Islamic View of Christianity"); Islam was more demonized than it had been for a long time.[16]

From this sad 1400-year history of the relations between Islam and the West we may draw the lesson that both worlds, especially in the era of weapons of mass destruction, must approach each other with tolerance if world peace is to be maintained and the predicted "clash of civilizations" (S. Huntington) to be avoided. The better the West understands Islam and Islam the West, the easier this will be. This book attempts to break through the "total, culturally determined barriers to understanding" between the two (Wolfgang Slim Freund) that are standing in the way of mutual comprehension.

15. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 16 October 1986, p. 9.

16. Sigrid Hunke's *Allah ist ganz anders: Enthüllungen von 1001 Vorurteilen über die Araber,* Bad König, 1990 was unable to counter this trend in spite of uncovering "1001 prejudices."

# THE COMPLETE FAITH

Christian missionaries attribute the rapid penetration of Islam into West Africa, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Ivory Coast to the simplicity of its teachings and its freedom from complicated mysteries. If this is true, it must be possible to describe this religion in a single chapter.

To be a Muslim rests on two assumptions, (a) the belief in a personal (but genderless), transcendental God (but who is active in the world);[1] and (b) the belief in His revelations, ultimately leading from Abraham to Muhammad.

Muslims *believe* in God because His existence is logical to them in view of the existence of the world (i.e., ontologically) and its contingency (i.e., causally), despite their knowledge that, from a scientific point of view, it is questionable to infer what cannot be perceived by the senses from what can, especially since the validity of our logic for such operations is not verifiable.

In the first part of the two-part Islamic profession of faith the Muslim professes his faith in God (*ashhadu*), though not in the simplest possible form (*ashhadu an lā ilāha illa Allāh*) but, following *Sūrat al Ikhlāṣ* (112), he declares his opposition to dualistic, trinitarian or polytheistic ideas of God.

> **Say: He, God, is the One God:**
> **God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being**
> **He begets not nor is he begotten;**
> **and there is nothing that could be compared with Him.** [2]

With the formulation "I profess that there is no God besides God" (*ashhadu an lā ilāha illa Allāh*) the Muslim emphasizes the unity and uniqueness of God. From a Muslim point of view, the principle of unity (*tawḥīd*) applies to spirit and matter, soul and body, science and religion, man and

1. That God is "closer to us than our jugular vein" (50:16) should not be understood in terms of pantheism. See the Throne Verse, *Ayat al Kursi*, (2:255) for a dialectical description of both the immanence *and* transcendence of Allah.

2. Translation by Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar, 1980.

nature and also to Muslims as social beings: their aim is always to unite as a community (*Ummah*).

As radical [redacted]s Muslims are agnostics in terms of epistemological theory, regarding God's being, His essence, and His actions. They believe that it is only possible to define Him in negative terms; for example, that God has no beginning and no end, and therefore, cannot not be. Muslims are also convinced that it is impossible to find the way of life most fitting for human beings merely from the contemplation of nature. (The history of the theories and systems of "natural law" proves them right.) This is why they insist on the indispensability of revelation.

Furthermore, they *believe* that God sent His guidance to human beings through prophets of monotheism like Abraham, Moses and Jesus, whose messages were 'sealed' by the Qur'an, the culminating message brought by Muhammad ("Muhammad is . . . the seal of the prophets" [33:40], i.e., the last one). This is why the second part of the Islamic profession of faith necessarily says "and I profess that Muhammad is His messenger" (*wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlu Allah*).

Only that which is finished, in the case of divine revelation that which is complete, is to be sealed. Despite the work of Moses and Jesus there was a need and opportunity for completion: a *need,* because, from an Islamic point of view, Jews and Christians had falsified the message passed on to them—the Jews, through the postulation of a 'chosen' people negotiating with God; the Christians, through the postulation of a son conceived as God; an *opportunity,* because human development in the seventh century had progressed to the point where earlier norms could be replaced by definitive new ones.[3]

This explains the verse revealed on the ninth day of the month of Dhu al Ḥijjah, the Day of 'Arafah during Muhammad's final pilgrimage in 632, which was 81 or 82 days before Muhammad's death:

3. The possibility of replacing earlier verses by later ones, alluded to in 2:106, is generally believed not to refer to metaphysical or historical facts. I agree with Muhammad Asad that *ayah* is to be read here as 'message.' The implication is that there can be abrogation only in relation to pre-Qur'anic revelations. See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an,* Gibraltar 1980, footnote 87 to 2:106; and Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters,* vol. 1, Albany 1984, p. 138. Wherever there are conflicting rules within the Qur'an, they must be seen in a relationship of *lex specialis* and *lex generalis,* the former overriding the latter, even if revealed at a later date. On the subject of the gradual prohibition of alcohol, see Helmut Gätje, *Koran und Koranexegese,* Zurich, 1971, pp. 264 ff.

**This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam (i.e., submission to Allah) as your religion. (5:3)**[4]

'Muslim' is the active participle of the verbs *salama* or *aslama*, which correspond to the 'slm' root in Arabic (Arabic words being made up of three-letter roots), and which express the idea of intactness and submission. Accordingly, in the original Qur'anic definition, a Muslim is one who finds salvation through voluntary submission. On this basis Jesuit Father Johannes Sokolowsky SJ provided an exemplary definition of 'Islam' as "The submission (to God) which brings peace, and causes one to be fully in harmony, healthy and spiritually normal."[5] This is why men like Abraham, Jesus, and some pre-Islamic Arab hermits may be regarded as Muslims.

Today, however, 'Muslim' describes someone who finds peace in submission to God specifically in accordance with the Qur'an and the Prophet's model behavior (Sunnah); this includes earlier revelations as much as they are authentic and remain valid.

Thus, for example, a Muslim follows the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and the commandment to love thy neighbor of the New Testament. For him, as for Jews and Christians who have maintained their belief, there are six articles of faith which, according to the Qur'an, are the basis of all theological understanding of cosmic reality (2:285; 4:136; 9:51):

- the existence of God;
- the existence of other spiritual beings ("His angels");
- the existence of divine revelation ("His books");
- the sending of prophets ("His Messengers");
- Final Judgment / Life after death;
- predestination (see the chapter "Fatalism").

On the other hand, Islam prescribes a code of conduct and worship which is specific to it alone, and which, together with the profession of faith (*shahādah*), comprises the so-called 'five pillars':

- ritual prayer at fixed times, five times a day (salah),

4. Translation by Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, New Edition with revised translation, commentary and newly compiled subject index, amana publications, Beltsville, Md, 1996.

5. 'Friede und Islam,' in *Geist und Leben*, 1983, no. 2, p. 145.

- the annual payment of a capital tax (zakah),
- fasting during the day throughout the month of Ramaḍān (ṣawm),
- as far as possible, a pilgrimage to Makkah (ḥajj).[6]

These pillars show that Islam is based on belief and deed, prayer and work; even spiritual activities such as prayer are linked to physical activities. This is clearly expressed in *Sūrat al 'Aṣr* revealed in Makkah:

> **Surely man is in continuous loss, except those who believe and do good deeds and urge one another to act rightfully and urge one another to exercise patience. (103:1-3)**[7]

This is a miniature portrait of the good Muslim; he prays and trusts in God, does good works for his neighbors as well as for Islam, without activism or arrogance.

A Muslim may sin without calling into question whether he is a Muslim. But if he stops praying and, therefore, interrupts his contact with God, he can hardly be considered a Muslim. This prayer, in its ritually prescribed form (salah), is not a prayer of request but a prayer of praise, which does not, of course, exclude other forms and contents of prayer.

As the final revelation, the Qur'an is the most important, though not the only, basis of Islam. This book, with its 6236 verses (*ayāt*) unsystematically distributed over 114 *sūrahs* (parts or chapters), mostly in rhyming prose, contains the revelations which Muhammad received between about 610 and 632 in their complete and original form. For the Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God, not created but revealed in historical times and in the Arabic language: the only miracle of Islam (and at the same time Muhammad's 'miracle of attestation').[8] Thus, the Qur'an is not—as most of the Old and New Testament are—'inspired,' second-hand narration, but it is God's speech throughout, either in the first person singular or plural, or in the third person singular (so that we always remain conscious of the inadmissibility of personalizing His being anthropomorphically).

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6. 4:136; 2:285.

7. Translation by Rashid Said Kassab, *Translation of the Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an*, Amman, 1994.

8. For the history of the Qur'an see Ahmad von Denffer, *'Ulūm al Qur'an, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, Leicester 1983; and also Mohamed Talbi, *Reflexions sur le Coran*, Paris 1989; Paul Schwarzenau, *Korankunde für Christen*, 2nd edition, Hamburg 1990. For the orientalist's point of view: Rudi Paret, *Muhammad und der Koran*, Stuttgart, 1985.

A non-Muslim may deny the authenticity of the revelation, but he cannot deny the authenticity of the text. This was established by Western orientalists who had set out to prove the very opposite, using the same critical methods that had invalidated all but fragments of the Bible, in particular, the New Testament.

A non-Muslim may reject the content of the Qur'an, but he cannot ignore the fascination which emanates from the power of the language and the poetic force of the text, which enthralled Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Rückert.[9] For Arabs the extraordinary purity and harmony of the language of the Qur'an is proof of its supernatural origin. Unfortunately, some Muslims also extrapolate from God's statement in the Qur'an: "**We have not neglected a single thing in the book**" (6:38) that the Qur'an has an encyclopedic competence in areas that have nothing to do with theology and ethics, in particular, scientific phenomena.

That Maurice Bucaille has shown that, compared to the other Holy Books, only the Qur'an is not in conflict with modern scientific knowledge, is quite a different aspect.[10] Personally, I find the reference in *Sūrat al 'Alaq* (96), *ayah* 2 to the fertilization process in woman most impressive: from a medical point of view it was described correctly in the Qur'an 1400 years ago as a clinging or lodging (of the sperm cell). Until very recently the Arabic word in question, *'alaq*, was mistranslated simply because in this context no one could imagine anything appropriate for this word.

Although it is not possible to translate the Qur'an without loss of meaning, not least because of the particular characteristics of the Arabic language, in which it is possible to make temporally indeterminate statements, and because of its richness of associations, it has in fact become the most frequently translated,[11] most printed book in the history of the

9. Ahmad von Denffer, 'Der Islam und Goethe,' *Al Islām*, Munich 1990-1994. Achmed Schmiede, 'Goethe und der Islam', *Al Islam*, 1982, no. 6, p. 15; The German Orientalist poet Friedrich Rückert translated the Qur'an primarily in verse form and very well (*Der Koran* 1888, reprint Hildesheim 1980). Rather puzzlingly, Kant's doctorate certificate of 1755 shows the *basmalah* hand written on it: *"bi ism Allah al Rahmān al Rahīm"*; see Ahmad von Denffer, 'Deutsche Denker und der Islam', *Al Islam* 1985, no. 2, p. 20.

10. Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science: the Holy Scriptures examined in the light of modern knowledge*, translated by Alastair D. Pannell and Maurice Bucaille, Indianapolis 1978

11. See the *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an, Printed Translations 1515–1980*, IRCICA, Instanbul, 1986. As the first complete translation into English it lists a version dated 1648, based on the 1647 French translation by the Sieur du Ryer. The first translation into German was made in 1616 by Salomon Schweiggern based on the Italian.

world, and the only book which hundreds of thousands of people know by heart. It is *its* Arabic which now holds the Islamic world together, a world which today comprises more than a billion people.[12] Its grammar and its vocabulary explain the fact that Arabic is the only existing language whose 1400-year-old texts (including the Qur'an) can be read by commonly educated people, without depending on a translation into something like 'new high Arabic'.

The Qur'an has now become a sort of 'super weapon' (*Die Zeit*, Hamburg). After the Gulf War, it was the bestseller of 1991.[13] This is not necessarily a positive development, however, because Qur'anic studies without guidance can be counter-productive, and because there is a second source of Islamic knowledge: the traditions of the Prophet.

The Qur'an can only be properly understood if one is familiar with the historical context of individual revelations and with the coherent inner thread of the text. Commentaries frequently offer quite different viewpoints, according to whether they follow literal or 'hidden' meanings, Shi'ah or Sunni tendencies, or are written by a mystic or a rationalist,[14] by al Tabari of the ninth or Muhammad Asad of the twentieth century.[15]

Equally important is the knowledge of what the Prophet of Islam, a man of the highest integrity, authority, spirituality, and charisma[16] said, did, or consciously did not do (*Hadith*); for as the receiver of the message he was its born interpreter in cases of doubt. In addition, the Qur'an specifically demands that Muslims follow Muhammad's example in matters of faith and ethics. Islamic piety has turned this endeavor into the imitation of secondary details (like wearing a beard, methods of dental care, a preference for honey, etc.). This includes male circumcision, which, though not

12. For a national breakdown according to the *Yearbook of the Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1996, see pp. 310-311, which shows that Muslims in the world constitute one-fifth of the world's population (1,126,525,000).

13. Susanne Mayer, "Die Wunderwaffe," *Die Zeit*, 15 February 1991.

14. For a good overview of the subject see Muh. Surty, "A Survey of Tafsir Exegesis Literature in Arabic," *Muslim World Book Review*, Leicester 1987, no. 4, pp. 51ff; Rabah Stambouli, "Le commentaire coranique," in *El-Moujahid*, Algiers 30.3. and 1–4 April 1990; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. I and II, Albany, NY, 1984, 1992; and Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, London, 1996.

15. Al-Tabari, *The Commentary of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, Oxford 1987; Muh. Asad, *op. cit.*, footnote 2.

16. On the personality of Muhammad, see Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām, *The Life of Muhammad*, Oxford 1955; Muhammad Hussein Haikal, *Haiyat Muhammad*, Cairo, 1936 (with many translations); Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, New York, 1981; Virgil Gheorghiu, *La vie de Mahomet*, Paris 1970; Emile Dermenghem, *Mahomet*, Paris 1960; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad. A Western Attempt to Understand Islam*, London 1991.

mentioned in the Qur'an, is honored as a practice rooted in the Old Testament.

In some circles this natural, pious veneration of Muhammad—the precious tool chosen by God for His last revelation—has led to exalted and speculative forms of glorification, in particular, during the celebration of his birthday (*al mawlid al nabawī*), which is not entirely harmless given the career of Jesus during the development of Christology. This modest Arab, who on the occasion of the first revelation ('Read!. . .') in the "Night of Power" (*Laylat al Qadr*) admitted that he was *unlettered* and who always emphasized his mere humanity, has been portrayed as incapable of sinning, even as pre-existential cosmic light (the light of Muhammad), surrounded by myth and legend.[17]

Only the study of the several ḥadith collections, based on their specific science of tradition, permits one to gain a full understanding of Islamic moral teachings in all of their complexity. Only the practice of this 'sunnah' makes the specific *homo islamicus* and Islamic civilization.[18] It is not possible to describe this world here in detail. For our purposes it is more important to examine the significant differences between the Islamic and the Western, Christian-based image and understanding of man and morals in our day.

Despite the fundamental ethical feelings we have in common—virtues such as fraternity, honesty, pity, generosity, discretion, etc.—it is possible to isolate six major differences between the two:

1. A Muslim lives in a world without clergy and without religious hierarchy; when he prays he does not pray via Jesus, Mary or other interceding saints, but directly to God—as a fully emancipated believer—and this in a religion free of mysteries. An atmosphere of this kind suits the modern democratic citizen come of age far better than the wondrous, mystery-stricken atmosphere of the Byzantine and Catholic Churches, geared towards 'intercession' and focusing on sacraments administered by clergymen.

17. Annemarie Schimmel, *Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet*, Cologne 1981.

18. The most important Hadith collections are those of *al Bukhārī and Muslim*; complete translations are only available in English and French; see *Sahīh al Bukhārī*, 9 vols, Chicago 1976; *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4 vols, Lahore 1976. Now also available on CD-ROM and PC-disks like "Sakhr" and "MacHadith" for the Macintosh. For complete descriptions of the Islamic faith I refer to Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya—La Wasitiyya*, Paris 1986; Muh. Abdou, *Risālat at Tawḥīd*, Paris 1925; Muh. Hamidullah, *Initiation à l'Islam*, Algiers 1981.

2. With its absolute prohibition of pork, alcohol and other drugs Islam serves public health; it continues to insist on the fundamental responsibility of those who misuse addictive substances, instead of exculpating them as socially sick. The stress-reducing effect of regular contemplative prayer which structures a Muslim's day also contributes to the good physical and mental health of the individual and the whole society in a way unknown to Christian Sunday worship or morning prayer.

3. In contrast to St. Paul's condemnation of all matters sexual, defamation of marriage and the propagation of monasticism, which have been responsible for so much suffering, repression and guilt in the Christian world, Islam approves of clean and legitimate sexual activity without reservation. On the other hand, it does not approve of the over-reaction to the devastation wreaked by Paul—the modern 'sex wave' characterized by complete lack of inhibition. This composure corresponds to the fact that, in contrast to the West, Islam continues to abide by and defend the natural gender roles of men and women, in the conviction that it is not possible to act against the basics of nature for very long without risking catastrophe (see the chapters "Woman in Society" and "The Veiled Orient").

4. With its commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself, Christianity makes a demand impossible to fulfill by the average person, but which weighs heavily on his conscience; this, like the demonization of sexuality, leads to an intensification of the negative psychological consequences of the fateful Christian doctrine of original sin, up to a point where it becomes possible to manipulate the masses thanks to their sense of culpability. In contrast to this, Islam is a religion of the golden mean, whose commandments (Ramadan, daily prayer, etc) are not easy, but possible for everyone to fulfill. In addition, Islam does not teach Muslims to regard themselves as requiring salvation. Mass sociology has taught us the potentially evil consequences of a redemption syndrome.

5. The attitude of Muslims to business and work is socially oriented, not primarily focused on efficiency; it may therefore be regarded as a corrective to the derailing of industrial society. This is particularly true of the Qur'anic insistence on sharing profit and loss (see the chapter "The Islamic Market Economy").

6. Finally, the general attitude of Muslims, even toward a pluralistic, secular State should be one of exemplary tolerance, despite the latter's materialistic outlook and claim to be the only road to universal happiness (see the chapter "Tolerance or Violence?")—in keeping with the last vers-

es of *Sūrat al Kāfirūn* (109). This should indeed be pinned above the desk of every Muslim, Christian, atheist and agnostic, and also of the author of this book, before entering into any comparison of whatever system of belief:

> **I will not worship that which you have worshipped, Nor will you worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine!**[19]

19. Translation issued by the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, Al Madinah, 1992.

# The Islamic View of Christianity

Whenever a Muslim pronounces or reads the name of the Prophet Muhammad, also while reading this book, he always wishes peace and blessing upon him.[1] He should do the same whenever he utters the name of Jesus.

This might come as some surprise to readers unfamiliar with Islam's view of itself. Islam is not to be understood as a newer, younger religion than Christianity, but as the completion and reaffirmation of Abraham's pristine monotheism (42:13). Islam may thus be regarded as both the youngest *and* the oldest of the three world religions. In fact, quite apart from its basic tolerance,[2] Islam does not claim exclusiveness for itself as the Catholic Church still does in practice even after the second Vatican Council. Rather, recognizing all earlier prophets as a matter of principle and conviction,[3] Islam builds on the valid core of all earlier revelations;[4] in the words of Paul Schwarzenau, "the Qur'an is an ecumenical revelation".[5] God states in the Qur'an:

> **Say: We believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and the sons of Jacob, and what was given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and to Him have we submitted. (3:84)**[6]

The validity of Islam is not built on a rejection of the other two Semitic religions but derives from their comparison.[7] In fact Islam, Judaism and

1. *Ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam.* (God, bless Muhammad and grant him peace.)
2. See the chapter 'Tolerance or Violence?'
3. Qur'an 2:87; 6:83–87.
4. Qur'an 33:7; 5:46.
5. Paul Schwarzenau, *Korankunde für Christen*, second edition, Hamburg 1990. The author is Professor Emeritus of Protestant Theology.
6. Translation by Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, Riyadh, 1993.
7. See Emanuel Kellerhans, *Der Islam*, second edition, Basel 1956, pp. 377 f.

Christianity are related religions, whose differences are small in comparison to Buddhism and Hinduism.[8]

This explains why Muslims feel entitled to consider Jesus as a prophet of Islam, though not the last one. Because he "submitted totally to God's will," quintessentially he was indeed a 'Muslim'.[9] Islamic theology teaches that Muhammad (*Ahmad*) was announced not only in the Old Testament, but by Jesus, too, as the last prophet to seal all revelation (33:40).[10]

Islam's view of Jesus and Mary stems primarily from the third and the nineteenth *surahs* of the Qur'an,[11] but (and this is less well-known) also from the Islamic tradition (*Sunnah*). Both focus on Jesus' and Mary's unique function in the history of divine intervention and are, therefore, less narrative than archetypal:

> **And mention Mary in the book. When she drew aside . . . We sent to her Our angel of revelation and he appeared to her as a perfect human being . . . She said: "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" (19:16–20).**
>
> **He said: "Thus it is: God creates what He wills. When He wills a thing to be, He merely says to it: 'Be!' and it is. And He will teach him the scripture, and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel." (3:47f.)**
>
> **(He will say:) . . . I shall heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead back to life with God's permission. (3:49)**

8. This is how Father Gregor Böckermann sees it as well. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 September 1986, p. 11.

9. See William E. Phipps, *Muhammad and Jesus: A Comparison of the Prophets and Their Teachings*, London, 1996; Muh. Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus, A Prophet of Islam*, third edition, London 1983; Ahmad Abdel-Wahab, *Dialogue Transtextuel entre le Christianisme et l'Islam*, Paris 1987; Kenneth G. Robertson, *Jesus or Isa: A Comparison of the Jesus of the Bible and the Jesus of the Koran*, New York 1983; Nilo Geagea, *Mary of the Koran: A Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam*, New York 1984. A. von Denffer, *Der Islam und Jesus*, Munich 1991.

10. This is based on John 14,26 and John 16,13 with the assumption that Parakletos (supporter, comforter) should actually read Periklytos—in Arabic 'Ahmad'. See David Benjamin, *Muhammad in der Bibel*, Munich 1987, pp. 183ff.; Sahib Mustaqim Bleher, *Das Zeugnis der Bibel–Biblische Stellen weisen auf die Wahrheit des Koran*, Weilerswist, 1984, pp. 18, Schwarzenau, *op. cit.*

11. See also 2: 116f; 21: 26–30.

Clearly, Muslims see Jesus as a miracle-working, divinely inspired (5:110) prophet in the Jewish tradition; not begotten (112:3; 72:3) but created by divine intervention; born of Mary, the Virgin. He is *not* regarded as a pre-existential, consubstantial, divine 'Son of God' as taught by the doctrine of incarnation, but as His chosen servant (*'abd*):

> **They say: "God has taken (unto Him) a son." Glorified be He! He has no needs. (10:68)** [12]
>
> **And they say: "The Most Gracious has taken a son (for Himself)." Certainly, you have made a monstrous allegation. (19:88)**

The Qur'an clearly rejects any idea of a divine Trinity (5:72–75), including a *de facto* divinization of Mary (5:116–118) which might result from an excessive adoration of her (of which the dogma of her ascension to Heaven is an example).[13] Like her son, Mary was "a sign for the world" (21:91) and "one of the obedient ones" (66:12), no more and no less:

> **. . . and do not say "three". Refrain (from that) . . . God is but one God. (4:171)**

The Qur'an confirms Jesus' ascension to heaven (4:158) which, however, was not preceeded by his death on the cross as described in the Gospels (4:157).

How may the rejection of the divine nature of Jesus, of the personalized 'Holy Spirit' and of the Trinity be regarded today? I believe that Islam will win supporters from the Christian camp, especially in this regard.

In everyday Christian life the 'Holy Spirit' hardly plays a role any more. It is becoming evident that this divine 'person' is an intellectual construct, owing its postulation to Platonic and Gnostic notions, but also to Neoplatonic ideas which had belatedly infiltrated the Church. I refer less to Isis/Osiris/Horus than to Plato's God/Demiurge/Logos and to the trilogy existence/reason/soul of Plotinus and Proclus. The author of the Gospel of

12. Translation by Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: Explanatory Translation*, Revised and Edited in Modern Standard English by Dr. Arafat El Ashi, amana publications, Beltsville, MD, 1996.

13. In the religion as practiced, Mary has certainly relegated the Holy Spirit to fourth place. That it is possible for Muslim Sufi to give in to excessive adoration of Mary is clear from the cosmic hymn to her by Charles-André Gilis, *Marie en Islam*, Paris 1990.

John, whoever he was, obviously breathed thin speculative air: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word. . ."

The philosophical figure of the 'Logos' as a third divine person made its entry into the text of the New Testament through a process of creative translation. The relevant word 'comforter' was first rendered as 'spirit' and then, in capital letters, as 'Holy Spirit'.[14]

'Logos' or 'spirit' is, however, described throughout the New Testament as something other than a person, amongst other things as 'the spirit of God' (1. Cor. 2: 10–12) and as a 'gift' (Luke 11:13). At any rate, Jesus never referred to a Trinity which after all would have been for him a fundamental matter; he, like all Jewish Christians, apparently harbored the Jewish idea of a unitary God.[15]

As is well known, all this did not prevent the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) from establishing a Trinity, an act which was not declaratory but constitutive—nevertheless a man-made dogma and no more. But it eliminated all early Christian literature which contradicted this construction.

Just as important (or tragic) is the fact that the oldest surviving manuscripts of the New Testament were all written *after* the Council. Although one does not necessarily have to agree with Karlheinz Deschner, who refers to the 'criminal history of Christianity,' his thesis of a 'falsified religion' corresponds closely to Muslim theory.[16]

As far as the ontological status of *Jesus* and his role as a savior are concerned, the situation is similar. Today, not only Protestant theologians, but also some Catholic ones, no longer delude themselves about the precarious nature of the sources from which the historicity of Jesus might be established, let alone the countless contradictions and anachronisms in the Gospels and the subsequent introduction of heathen notions into Christian practice. The evidence is so poor that scientific research has even put into doubt whether Jesus was ever put on trial. At any rate, there

14. John 14,16 and 14,25 lend themselves for this operation; cf. Bleher, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–22, Benjamin *op. cit.*, pp. 180ff.

15. See Adolf Schlatter, *Die Geschichte der ersten Christenheit*, Gütersloh 1892; John Hick and Edmund S. Meltzer (eds) *Three Faiths—One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter*, London 1986; Gerd Lüdemann, Ketzer. *Die andere Seite des frühen Chirstentums*, Stuttgart, 1995.

16. Karlheinz Deschner, *Der gefälschte Glaube*, Munich 1988; *Deschner, Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, Hamburg, vol. 1, 1986; vol. 2, 1988.

are few reliable facts about his death, since there were no eye-witnesses at his burial and ascension.[17]

This situation helps to explain the 'Jesus boom' in contemporary literature, the index of which runs to some 500 pages for the past thirty years alone.

Even more precarious is the evidence regarding incarnation. In a correct translation of the New Testament the unbiased reader would not find a single reference allowing him to infer a divine nature of Jesus. He and God are not treated as identical. Indeed, the opposite is the case, not only at Golgotha, but in general. Even in John, Jesus says: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God" (20: 17).

We should not read much into terms such as 'father' and 'son,' for they are used allegorically in all religions for allegorizing the relationship with God, our creator.

Against this background it is possible today to distinguish at least four Christologies within the Churches:

1. A majority of simple believers, especially in rural areas, practice monotheism, in which God is more or less identical with Jesus. This anthropomorphic idea of God—the Unfathomable as infant in the crib—stems from our desire to worship something which is not so very different from ourselves. (It was *this* God whom Nietzsche could have killed!)
2. In the Protestant world in particular, even amongst the clergy, Jesus is regarded less and less as God, and more and more as a pure but exalted human being who set standards by living according to the principle of brotherly love, a touching man whom it is worth emulating, whether or not he so existed: after all, has Christian-Humanistic philosophy not proven itself as a value in and by itself?

   Thus, Jesus is in danger of being reduced to become the prototype of the ideal social worker, suffering like us, and with us, within the framework of a theology of misery.
3. At the opposite pole to this is a Christology which conjures up a 'cosmic' or 'mythological' Jesus, thus seeking (and finding) refuge in mystery and mysticism from insoluble hermeneutical problems.

   This, at any rate, is how I read authors like the American ex-Dominican Matthew Fox and Rüdiger Altmann, when the latter

17. See Weddig Fricke, "Standrechtlich gekreuzigt," *Person und Prozess des Jesus von Galiläa*, Frankfurt 1986; Gerd Lüdemann, *Die Auferstehung Jesu*, Göttingen, 1994.

writes of a 'Mystery of the night' "in which a God (sic) was born" and who professes a 'Gnosis of Christianity'.[18] Believers of this kind are satisfied with the sources as they are, as long as they can serve as something on which to hang the mythologies of God, the Great Mother, Light, Sin, and Salvation. Theologists of this kind have no inhibitions about speaking of "God realizing Himself fully through becoming man," and of maintaining, without fear of blasphemy, that "He, God, became someone else through incarnation."[19]

4. Finally, there is the tendency represented by John Hick and the Swiss theologian Hans Küng. They and many others admit the fragility of the original texts of Christianity courageously and with no illusions, but do not seek refuge in gnostic illumination or banal worldliness. Rather, they attempt to solve historical and ontological problems by a process of sacrificing untenable dogmas via new definitions. This leads to Jesus being reinterpreted as 'chosen and authorized by God,' and the Trinity becoming 'God's revelation in Jesus Christ through the Spirit'.[20]

   Küng thus drew the obvious conclusion from his recognition of "how great the distance is between the original statements about Father, Son, and Spirit and the later dogmatic Church teachings on Trinity" and "how different the Christological conceptions are already within the New Testament". He admits quite frankly that there is scarcely anything in it which might suggest even remotely, a doctrine of Trinity.[21]

If the genuine intention of this Christology is to say that Jesus is neither begotten by God nor consubstantial with him, and that God's spirit does not represent a divine person, then it is Islamic and confirms the frequently heard assertion that "Muslims are the better Christians," in line with the earliest (Jewish) Christians. As rediscovered by Küng, only in the Qur'an has the Christology of the Jewish Christians been preserved pure and unadulterated.

18. Rüdiger Altmann, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, supplement of 21 December 1985.

19. Hans Waldenfels, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24. November 1985.

20. Hans Küng and J. van Ess, "Christianity and World Religions: paths of dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism," Vol 1 *Islam*, translated by Peter Heinegg, London 1987; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (many editions).

21. Hans Küng, *Zu einem künftigen Dialog zwischen Christen und Muslimen, Universitas*, Stuttgart, 1984, p. 1351.

This new/old understanding of the nature and role of Jesus as a prophet is awe-inspiring, because to encounter a prophet among fellow human beings is indeed awe-inspiring. Yet this understanding of Jesus requires of its representatives to explain why they nevertheless continue to see themselves as, and to profess themselves to be, 'Christians'.[22]

In my opinion this loyalty has something to do with the Christian dogma of salvation and deliverance, based on the doctrine of original sin, and Jesus' Passion.

Islam rejects the idea of original sin because it is fatalistic, because it assumes that God's creation failed, and because it contradicts the Qur'anic principle that no one is made to carry someone else's burden; this certainly excludes the idea that mankind in its entirety, throughout the ages, was to be collectively responsible for acts committed by Adam and Eve. Ideas of this kind are in violation of the Islamic image of God.[23]

Islam denies the necessity of salvation and regards as blasphemous a theology of sacrificial death which states "In the death on the cross in which all humans' suffering is accumulated, God takes their sufferings upon Himself in order to save them".[24] For a theology of this kind assumes that God was unable to 'save' humankind without the creation of a second divine person for the purpose of his suffering. This idea—God as victim of mankind rebelling against Him—is in violation of the Islamic image of God as well.

Given these circumstances I agree with Paul Schwarzenau, when he characterizes the Muslims' denial of Jesus's death on the cross as a protest against the Christian ideology of the cross in general.[25] In the Muslim view of things it was not the Jews who killed Jesus, even if that is how it appeared to them, and Jesus did not suffer death on the cross, but was called by God at a later point in time and raised up to Heaven:

22. Hans Küng, *Why am I still a Christian?*, Edinburgh 1987, explains this in pedagogical terms.

23. For the function of original sin in Church history see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eva und die Schlange. Die Theologie der Sünde*, Reinbek 1990; also Isma'il al Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas*, McGill University Press 1967.

24. See Karl-Alfred Odin, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, leader of 4. 4. 1985; France has even seen the rise of a theology of a powerless God who constantly suffers with the poor, thus Jean Delumeau, *Ce que je crois*, Paris 1985.

25. Schwarzenau, *loc. cit*, p. 110.

**God said: "O Jesus! I shall cause you to die and shall exalt you unto Me . . ." (3:55)**

What actually happened at the scene of crucifixion no one knows despite many apocryphal speculations:[26]

**They have no knowledge, but follow mere conjecture; and they have certainly not killed him. Rather, God has exalted him unto Himself, and Allah is Almighty, Allwise. (4:157 f.)**[27]

For this reason the legend of the life and death of Jesus as an old man in Kashmir should be accepted for what it is.[28]

This, then, is the background to the highly topical question of what chance a Christian–Islamic dialogue, imperative for the maintenance of world peace, might have.[29]

"No world peace without religious peace." Hans Küng called a lecture on this subject held in Algiers on 22 November 1988, although he could not have known what would happen two years later in the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf. His hope is for a 'world ethos of nations' based on religious rapprochement and understanding—not a single religion, not a syncretic mixture, but global ethics.

A lot of preparatory work for this dialogue has been done, particularly on the part of Christians, on issues of substance[30] as well as on the atmosphere conducive to dialogue. This includes the interconfessional meetings in Cordoba, respectful publications by members of religious

26. See Hamza Boubakeur's intelligent commentary on 4:157 in his French translation of the Qur'an, third edition, Paris 1985; also G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, Oxford 1977. He places the emphasis not on the 'not killed' but on the 'they have', i.e., he suggests that the exterior course of events could have corresponded to Christian portrayals and have been quite different in reality; Ahmed Deedat believes that Jesus was bound to the cross without dying on it: *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* Durban, S.A., 1985.

27. See Muh. Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, footnote 171 to 4:157; Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 8th edition, Beltsville 1996, footnote 663 to 4:157. Both conclude that Jesus—whatever happened—did not die on the cross.

28. Andreas Faber-Kaiser, *Jesus lebte und starb in Kashmir*, Lucerne, 1986.

29. On the subject of the Christian-Islamic dialogue, see S. M. Abdullah, *Islam: für das Gespräch mit Christen*, 3rd edition, Altenberge 1990.

30. See *Im Gespräch: Islam und Christentum*, Cologne 1983; Maurice Borrmans, *Wege zum christlich-islamischen Dialog*, Frankfurt 1985;H.M. Baagil, *Christian Muslim Dialogue*, Birmingham, 1984; *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, amana publications, ed. Isma'il R. al Faruqi, Beltsville, MD, 1995.

orders such as Michel Lelong,[31] the Pope's annual greetings to Muslims on the occasion of the feast of fast-breaking (*'Īd al Fiṭr*), and his invitation to a prayer community in Assisi on 27 October 1986.

But mutual understanding presupposes that both sides accept each other as each side sees itself. For Muslims, this means that they should not accuse Christians of being polytheists, despite what, from an Islamic point of view, appears to be a qualified monotheism. Christians in turn are required to scrap the intolerable doctrine *extra ecclesiam nullum salus* (no salvation outside the Church), not only formally, as occurred in Vatican II, but mentally too. This is unlikely for as long as the Catholic Church adheres to the principle of *extra ecclesiam nullus propheta* (no prophets outside the Church), accepting Islam as a path to 'Salvation' without accepting Muhammad so far as a guide on that path. In fact, one of Vatican II's inconsistencies was that it decided to regard even Muslims 'with respect,' yet carefully avoided any reference to the Qur'an and the man who transmitted it.[32]

From this state of affairs we can already see that rapprochement on theological matters is likely to remain limited, as long as there remain hard core, inflexible and therefore non-negotiable conflicting positions.

As Hans Küng observed in his Cordoba lecture, these are:

- the divine nature of Jesus for Christians;
- the divine revelation of the Qur'an for Muslims;
- the divine link between God and His 'Chosen People' for Jews;

Indeed, the contrast is clear: at the center of Christianity is a person, at the center of Islam is a book and at the center of Judaism is a pledge. From this point of view, God's Word was made flesh in Christianity, in Islam God's Word became a book.[33]

In as much as this is true, a theological reconciliation is only conceivable if Christianity adopts Küng's understanding of Jesus and accepts the Qur'an as a Holy Book.

This does not mean that there is no point in ecumenical dialogue, as long as non-negotiable aspects are excluded. One should never underestimate the value of small steps and the practical value of meetings on a human level, especially with guest workers or immigrants, as long as no

31. Michel Lelong, *Si Dieu l'avait voulu* . . . Paris 1986.

32. Hans Küng, *Christentum und Islam, Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, Stuttgart, 1985, no. 3, pp. 311 ff.

33. Hans Küng, *Die Welt*, Hamburg, 6 March 1989, p. 13.

one harbors the ulterior motive of proselyting. It is a well-known fact, attested to by White Fathers and Sisters in North Africa, that Muslims can hardly be converted to Christianity, at any rate.

It is an entirely different question whether the Islamo-Christian dialogue, in case of success, would be relevant. This is a fully justified question because de-Christianization, especially in Europe, has progressed to such a point that both Muslims *and* Christians now seem to be minorities, sharing the same boat in an ocean of materialism, agnosticism, and atheism. This is a world which lacks any antenna for dialoguing with people of religion.

# BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

The dream of 'my home is my castle' has materialized in Islam. Eavesdropping, spying on or annoying your neighbors is not allowed. If you have knocked three times and they have still not answered the door, leave them in peace. In short: mind your own business.[1]

But the thirst for knowledge, intellectual curiosity, is something quite different: according to both Qur'an and Sunnah the quest for knowledge is an attitude typical of every Muslim.

On dozens of occasions the Qur'an encourages us to use our reason and faculty of understanding in order to increase our knowledge (20:14):

**Will you not use your reason? (2:44)**

**Do you not see . . . ? (31:20)**

**Do you not then reflect? (6:50)**

It is possible to read the very first revelation to Muhammad—verses 1–5 of *Sūrat al 'Alaq* (96)—as an appeal to acquire reading and writing skills, to become literate:

**Read, for your Lord is the most Generous One, Who taught (to write) with the pen, Taught man what he did not know (96:3–5).**

The true, pensive Muslim thinks about God and creation "standing, sitting and lying down," he strives for objectivity, regardless of personal preferences, demanding evidence, not mere conjecture.[2] Similarly, according to a very popular Muslim maxim one ought to acquire knowledge even if that meant travelling to China.[3] Nowadays to follow suit might correspond to a journey to the moon. The Prophet greatly respected knowledge and learning; he is reported to have said:

1. See Qur'an 24:27 and the Prophet's Hadiths in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* No. 5354ff, and Hadith no. 12 in *Al Nawāwi, Forty Hadith*, Leicester, 3rd edition, 1977.

2. 3:191, 28:75, 30:29, 43:20, 45:24.

3. This saying is not based on an authentic hadith but popular nevertheless.

> On the Day of Judgement the ink of the scholars and the blood of the religious martyrs will be weighed—and the ink of the scholars will weigh more than the blood of the martyrs.[4]

The Prophet's companions, including the first Caliphs, took this call seriously, as was beautifully illustrated by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's response to the question whether he used any written documents other than the Qur'an. "No," he replied, "nothing other than Allah's book, the power of understanding given to every Muslim and one piece of paper" (with notes about three decisions of the Prophet).[5]

This joyful curiosity, combined with a readiness always to exert one's mind, was the right platform for the extraordinary development of the Islamic sciences from the late eighth century onwards, a mere fourteen striking examples of which are outlined below:[6]

- Ibn Firnas (died 888) to whom the first flying machine is attributed;
- Muhammad b. Musa al Khwarizmi (died 846), father of algebra (*al jabr*) and of the algorithm—this term being a corruption of his name;
- Abu Bakr al Razi/Rhazes (864–935), whose medical work *Mansuri*, the *Liber Almansoris*, was used for centuries in European universities;
- The philosopher and physician Ibn Sina/Avicenna (980–1037), whose medical encyclopedia was still in use in European universities in the early nineteenth century;
- Al Hasan b. al Haytham/Alhazen (965–1039), inventor of the camera obscura;
- Abu al Rayhan al Biruni (973–1050), universal genius on a par with Goethe, historian of science, diplomat, student of Sanskrit, astrologer, mineralogist, pharmacologist, etc.;
- Umar al Khayyam (died between 1123 and 1131), poet and mathematician. He also reformed the Indian calendar with greater accuracy than the 1582 Gregorian calendar;

4. *Kanz al 'Ummal*, vol. 10, hadiths 28899–28902; Abdülkadir Karahan, *Kirk Hadis*, Istanbul 1991, Hadith 22, p. 52. See also *Ihyā 'Ulūm al Dīn, Book of Worship*, English trans. by Fazlul Karim.

5. *Ṣaḥīḥ al Bukhārī*, "Book of Knowledge (III)," Hadith 111.

6. See for details Joseph Schacht and C. E. Bosworth, *Das Vermächtnis des Islams*, 2 vols, Munich 1983; Thomas Arnold and Arthur Guillaume, *The Legacy of Islam*, Oxford 1931; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, Chicago 1974; Alistair Crombie, "Griechisch-arabische Naturwissenschaften und abendländisches Denken," in *Europa und der Orient* 800–1900, Gütersloh 1989.

• The jurist/philosopher Ibn Rushd/Averroës (1126–1198) who, as a multiple commentator on Aristotle, had a great influence on Western philosophy (and who also discovered sunspots in his spare time);[7]

• The Egyptian physician Ibn al Nafis (died 1288) who discovered blood circulation;

• Ibn Baṭṭuṭah (1304–1368 or 1377), Moroccan globetrotter on a par with Marco Polo, who reached Timbuktu, Peking, and the Volga.

• The Andalusian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) whose introduction (*al Muqaddimah*) to his history of the world (*kitāb al 'Ibar*) made him both the founder of sociology and of modern historiography, introducing a revolutionary critique of traditional historical sources;[8]

• The navigator Ahmad Ibn Majid, fifteenth-century authority on ocean voyages.

• The Turkish ocean geographer and admiral Piri Reis (1480–1553), whose *Kitab-i Bahriye*, with its precise maps of the seas, still amazes us,[9] and his scientific colleague Seyyidi Ali Reis (died 1562) who measured the Asiatic coasts and developed nautical astronomy.

This short list alone shows that it was not the Occident which inherited the Hellenistic civilization, but the Islamic world. In view of the explosion of knowledge and technology in the Islamic world, it is self-evident that cultural exchange in the Middle Ages was a one-way street. In fact, the Muslims could find hardly anything worth learning from the Occident (Marshall Hodgson). The West was a 'net importer'—from the windmill and troubadours' songs to the 'Gothic' pointed arch. This cultural imperialism and one-sided globalization—as we would call it today—quite naturally left traces in European languages. When we speak of admiral, algebra, cipher, amalgam, alcohol, lute, guitar, alcove, muslin or tariff we are still using Arabic vocabulary today.

But the Islamic arts and sciences, especially the natural sciences, faded during the fourteenth century. One reason for this was the emerging theory of *taqlīd*, the voluntary "closing of the doors of (free) interpretation," discussed in the chapter "Fundamentalism": a theory which led to the *de facto* atrophy of research in favor of the preservation (and recapitulation) of what was already known. According to this theory, everything that

7. Ibn Rushd's competence in jurisprudence, especially comparative law, was equally impressive; see *Ibn Rushd—The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, trans. Imran A. Khan Nyazee, 2 vol., Reading, 1994, 1996.

8. *The Muqqadimah*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, Princeton 1976.

9. *Kitab-i Bahriye Piri Reis*, Istanbul 1988.

should be known and was worth knowing was already known and better understood by those closer in time to the revelation.

Parts of the Qur'an and Sunnah could be interpreted in this way. Thus, the verse: **"We have no knowledge but that which You have taught us"** (2:32) could be understood to mean that any attempt to find knowledge not contained in the Qur'an is inappropriate. Does God not speak of a type of learning which **"does not benefit them"** (2:102), useless knowledge, so to speak?

This explains the hostility towards science and philosophy expressed by some Islamic scholars (*'ulamā'*) who made much of the fact that the Prophet consciously and repeatedly refused to answer questions. From the fifteenth century onwards this attitude inevitably led to a certain doctrine of abstinence from knowledge in a number of respects.[10]

This trend was intensified by the fear of introducing bad things through forbidden innovation (*bid'ah*). According to the Sunnah a distinction should be made on principle between desirable, good innovation (*bid'ah ḥasanah*) and prohibited, bad innovation (*bid'ah sayyi'ah*). In the Afterlife serious punishments are reserved for those who introduced the latter. Soon, however, every innovation was suspected of being inadmissible; and the term *bid'ah* took on the general meaning of 'bad innovation':[11]

> Beware of new things; for every new thing is an innovation and every innovation a mistake . . .[12]

As the Middle Ages progressed, the allegation of *bid'ah* became a formidable weapon against progress.

The extent to which this is still a burning issue, curbing the ability of Islamic States to react to modern challenges, is shown by the fact that Prof. Hassan Ben Saddik (Tangiers) was asked to hold a lecture on the issue before King Hassan II in Rabat on 24 March 1991. The aim was apparently to remind the public that the traditions in question referred to

10. Al Nawawi, *op. cit.*, ḥadith no. 30.

11. Lately, when after prayer in Riyadh I wanted to shake hands with my neighbors in the mosque, saying *"taqabbala Allahu!"* (May God accept [your prayer]), I, too, was accused by them of *'bid'ah'*.

12. Al Nawawi, *op. cit.*, ḥadith no. 28; see also no. 5 and *Saḥīḥ Muslim. Aḥadith* nos. 6466–6470.

theological and ethical innovations only, and did not stand in the way of *technological* progress.[13]

Of course, the decline which took place from the fourteenth century onwards was not entirely without rays of hope. There were creative spirits at work even during this period particularly in the theological, literary and architectural worlds. (We need only to think of the Taj Mahal (1634) and the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, built at the same time). To mention but a few, they were thinkers like the Indian Shaykh Wali Allah (1703–1763), Muhammad b. 'Abd al Wahhab (1703–1787) in Arabia and Amadu Bamba (1850–1927) in Senegal, all forerunners of fundamentalist and purist reform movements. The brotherhoods that now dominate West Africa, the Murīdīyya and Tijanīyah or Ahmadīyah, for whom Fes has become the center, were also founded during the period of decline.

But these rays of hope were darkened by the significant lack of Islamic natural scientists and the reactionary activities of *'ulamā'* hostile to any kind of innovation. In 1580 in Istanbul, they had the observatorium destroyed, erected only the year before. As late as 1745, they succeeded in prohibiting the first printing press in the Islamic world, which had existed in the same city since 1728. It is hardly surprising that there were only 5,000 secondary school pupils in Egypt in 1875, but 11,000 students at the Al Azhar University, which offered a traditional education but was incompetent in the field of science.

As a consequence only one scientist hailing from the Islamic world has ever been awarded the Nobel prize—the Pakistani physicist Abdes-salam Ahmed.

Islamic philosophy has also frequently been accused of playing a major part in the decline of the intellectual life of the Ummah. Its fascinating history, however, does not warrant such unambiguous conclusions.[14]

13. The lecture, which I was allowed to attend, was published in four installments over the following days by *Le Matin du Sahara et du Maghrib* (Casablanca). The speaker established that, for example, minutes of silence (instead of 'prayers for the absent') and charity tombolas (because of gambling) are forbidden innovations.

14. See M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 2 vols, Wiesbaden 1963; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, London 1983; T. J. de Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, London 1903; Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London 1993; Georges Anawati, "Philosophie, Theologie und Mystik," in *Das Vermächtnis des Islams*, *op. cit.*; Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge 1985; Murad W. Hofmann, *Zur Rolle der islamischen Philosophie*, Cologne 1984; Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam*, Brookfield, Vermont, 1994.

Since the ninth century, under the influence of Greek philosophy, Muslims had been trying to turn the Qur'anic revelation (which, of course, is not a philosophical dissertation) into a comprehensive, rational system of thought. The school of the so-called Mu'tazilites, established in Baṣrah and Baghdad, increasingly integrated itself into the pattern of Greek thinking, but was still more philosophical theology than theological philosophy. The rationalists of the Mu'tazilah still accepted the thesis that "at the beginning was the Qur'an"; they accepted the existence of God and the revelatory nature of the Qur'an without question, not yet asking *whether* God existed, but rather, *how* He was and functioned.

But in their attempts to reconcile the Qur'an with Reason the Mu'tazilites soon entered the realm of metaphysical speculation and slid into heretical positions, even while they did not question the validity of Qur'anic statements which conflicted with their reasoning, but interpreted them as allegorical. Nevertheless, on their favorite subjects this led to attitudes which were regarded as blasphemous, scandalous, even insane by the Orthodoxy. According to the Mu'tazilah:

- God has no attributes in the sense of the 99 most beautiful names (see the chapter "Fatalism"); despite *ayah* 41:47 He knows only universals, no particulars;
- The world was not created (and is therefore eternal);
- The Qur'an is created;
- Man possesses free will as a co-creator ( see the chapter "Fatalism"); 'evil' is his creation alone; and
- Man will not be physically resurrected.

Clearly, at that point Mu'tazilite philosophers no longer took the Qur'an, but their own logic as decisive criterion, drafting a bloodless, cerebral picture of God.

This rationalistic philosophy based on Aristotelean ideas reached its climax in the twelveth century with Averroës.[15]

It must have been no less worrying for the Orthodoxy that under the influence of Neoplatonism other Muslim philosophers were proceeding almost simultaneously on the path of 'illumination,' attempting to bring

15. Averroës, *Tahafut al Tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), London 1978; Averroës, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, London 1961; Hans Wilderotter, *Aristoteles, Averroës und der Weg der arabischen Philosophie nach Europa, in Europa und der Orient* 800–1900, Gütersloh, 1989.

Islam into accord with Gnosticism, the theory of immanation and light mysticism, as was the case with the three great intellectuals Abu Nasr Muhammad al Farabi/Alpharabius (c. 873–c. 950), Muhy al Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240)[16] and Abu 'Ali al Husain b. Sina/Avicenna (980–1037).[17]

The counter-reaction, in the form of the Ash'arite school followed quickly. They denied the premises upon which the entire Mu'tazilite edifice of ideas was based, namely, the assumption that human perception and logic could lead to knowledge about metaphysical reality. Their leader Abu al Hasan al Ash'arī (873–935) not only made philosophy the servant of theology once more, but took all metaphysics, including thinking in terms of causality, to absurdity. According to al Ash'arī and Abu Hamid al Ghazali/Algazel (1058–1111)[18] who completed his work, all being exists in the absence of any laws of causality binding on God, unfathomable for man, as God's will, habit or imagination.

The final assault against speculative philosophy, bringing about its 'downfall,' was led by al Ghazali against Ibn Sina with his book on the *Incoherence of Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al Falāsifah*), which one generation later inspired the refreshing polemics of Ibn Rushd's *The Incoherence of Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al Tahāfut*). Since then it has been a maxim of Sunni Islam that any precise knowledge of God and His actions can only be gained through revelation (which eludes analysis) and cannot be obtained through reasoning. The Muslim must accept the word of God as he finds it, without, in philosophical hubris, asking 'how'.

Since then, the intellectual Muslim has renounced metaphysics; and 'Islamic' philosophy has existed only under the cloak of mysticism (often Shi'ah in nature), as in the Brotherhood of Purity (*Ikhwān al Ṣafā*) of Baṣrah[19] (see the chapter "Mysticism").

16. Ibn 'Arabi, *La Profession de Foi*, Paris 1985. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Un Océan sans Rivage, Ibn Arabi, Le Livre et la Loi*, Paris, 1992.

17. See Gerhard Endress, "Der erste Lehrer," Der arabische Aristoteles und das Konzept der Philosophie, in *Festschrift für A. Falaturi*, Cologne 1991, pp. 151ff.; and *Avicenna on Theology*, London 1951.

18. His moving "Confessions" entitled *Al Munqidh min al Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error) are very enlightening. See *The Confessions of Al Ghazzālī*, translated by Claud Field, Lahore 1978. For the most important of his more than 400 works, see *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al Dīn*, 4 vols; Lahore (no date); for mystical tendencies see al Ghazali's *Mishkāt al Anwār*, (The Niche for Lights), translated by W. H. T. Gairdner, New Delhi 1923; Farid Jabre, *La Notion de la Ma'rifa chez Ghazali*, Beirut 1958.

19. See Ikhwān al Ṣafā, *The Case of the Animals Versus Man before the King of the Jinn: A Tenth-century Ecological Fable of the Pure Brethren of Baṣrah*, translated by Lenn Evan Goodman, Boston 1978.

Thus orthodox 'counter philosophy' was no more (and did not want to be more) than radical epistemological theory, leading, via a rational agnosticism qualified by the Qur'an, to an intellectual humility which today—1000 years later—seems uncommonly modern. It was not Ludwig Wittgenstein in the twentieth century, but al Ash'arī in the ninth century who heralded the 'end of philosophy'. It was not David Hume and modern scientific theory, but the Ash'arites who first recognized the undemonstrability of the law of causality. It was not Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason,* 1781) and the modern theorists of linguistic philosophy (philosophy as a 'language game') who first developed a radical epistemology, but the Muslim philosophers of the ninth century.

If the critical Western thinkers mentioned above did not trigger a decline in Western culture, how can we blame Islamic philosophy for the cultural decline of the Islamic world?

Against this background, let us now examine Islam's present attitude toward the other sciences, in particular, modern natural science.

Point of departure must be the Muslim conviction that real discrepancies between the results of scientific research and the Qur'an are precluded. Therefore, they attribute such discrepancies to misinterpretation—either of the Qur'an or of the results of research data.

The real problem in this context is the modern concept of science. Muslims not only accuse science of posing illegitimately as a substitute for religion, but also of making a bad job of it. Seyyed Hossein Nasr put this brilliantly at a conference of the Max Planck Society for Physics and Astrophysics in 1983:

> Islam cannot accept the reductionism of modern science, which reduces metaphysics to psychology, psychology to biology, biology to chemistry and chemistry to physics, therefore reducing all elements of reality to the lowest level of manifestation, the physical.

This requires clarification:

On the one hand, from the Islamic point of view, Western science is carried out too autonomously, as 'art for art's sake,' and with too great a degree of gullibility. *Extra scientiam nullum salus* (No salvation outside of the sciences) could well be many a scientist's profession of faith as a 'believer without religion'. He defines God in terms of gaps in verifiable knowledge, man as a risk factor in a technical environment, and the social

system as a trivial machine. Thus, as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas said, the moral code in the modern era, just like art, becomes an "embodiment of the principle of subjectivity".[20] Indeed, religion is frequently regarded in our 'scientific age' as a backward, irrational way of solving problems of the human psyche. Nietzsche wanted to kill God—that was bound to fail; scientists want to kill the belief in God—this may well succeed.

And yet empirical, positivist science cannot replace the religion it supplants when it comes to supplying meaning and to setting moral norms. In this sense, the two operate on totally different planes. Even with Sir Karl Popper's method of 'trial and error,' the continuous falsification of emerging hypotheses, science does not acquire normative competence, but remains bound to what is quantifiable. Morals are not physical functions, 'meaning' is not the result of a biochemical compound and love is terribly unscientific.

Indeed, in the ideological domain, science has led modern man only to skepticism, the loss of certainty, data fetishism and a latent identity crisis. At best, it can offer a sort of secularized post-Christian eschatology with its ideology of progress.[21] It produces questions *ad infinitum* without giving definitive answers, which once led André Malraux to ask whether "a civilization of questions and of the moment" could be viable? Michael Harrington's question is basically the same: "Where is there in our relativistic technological society a social ethic which can save us from our brilliance?"[22]

Muslims are not the only ones who object to this false development of science as a (bad) substitute for religion.[23] On the contrary, contemporary 'searchers for standards,' such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Helmut Kuhn, and Daniel Bell are on this path. People speak of the return to metaphysics as a result of the belated recognition that the more enlightened the modern world becomes, the more indispensable religion is: at least in order to legitimize power and law, for ethical motivation and social coherence. In short: people are once again starting to recognize that the-

20. Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt 1985.

21. See Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago 1949.

22. Jürgen Habermas, *op. cit.*; Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral: The Spiritual Crisis of Western Civilisation*, New York 1983.

23. See also amongst others Alfred North Whitehead, *Wie entsteht Religion?*, Frankfurt 1985; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester 1986; Ernest Gellner, *Relativism and the Social Sciences*, Cambridge 1985.

ology and political sciences are mutually supportive and that the prediction of a demise of religion, to say the least, had been provincial.[24]

The collapse of Darwinism, Freudianism, Marxism and old physics contributed to this trend, especially since the brain will not succeed in researching the brain.[25] Scientists are becoming more modest since they have begun to recognize that so-called 'natural laws' may only represent approximations that the world is not a machine functioning according to our previous naive conception of causality, and that our brain dwarfs any gadget invented by Bill Gates.

In the opinion of many Muslim academics, even a science freed from its hubris is not value-neutral, and still has to be 'Islamized'. Their motto is to "introduce Islam into knowledge," and this has its own history.

The colonization of the Arab world led to the general adoption of Western civilization by the élites in the hope of catching up with the West; however, the result of assimilation was disappointing. Muslim students usually remained behind their Western counterparts in learning and, at the same time, lost the basis of their own civilization. Torn between two cultures, they became frustrated consumers of a foreign technology that they could not master.

The reactive negative result is a frequently encountered Third World technophobia. Western technology is demonized because it was developed in an atheistic environment and encourages a fundamentally skeptical and critical approach. In contrast, more level-headed Muslims point to the basic value-neutrality of technology and call for its selective use within the framework of an Islamic society.[26]

The call for the Islamization of knowledge pioneered by the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Herndon, VA, and by the International Islamic University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is more positive. It does not call for rejection of the Western model 'lock, stock and barrel,' but for Islamic education and university reform.[27]

24. Parvez Manzoor, "The Crisis of Intellect and Reason in the West," *The Muslim World Book Review*, Leicester, 1987, no. 2, p. 3; Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, London, 1976.

25. See. Ed. Quentin Skinner, *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences;* the main problem with brain research is the fact that perceptions take place there and not in the eyes or ears. Also see Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain—An Argument for Interactionism*, N.Y., NY, 1977.

26. This is the position, for example, of the Nobel Prize winner A. Abdessalam, 'Islam et Sciences', *El-Moujahid*, Algiers, 16 and 17. 4. 1989.

27. See *Islamization of Knowledge, General Principles and Workplan*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 3rd edition, Herndon, VA, 1995; Dawud Assad, "The Islamization of Knowledge," in *The Muslim World*, 21. 12. 1985.

In fact, there is room for great improvement in the schools and universities of all Muslim countries, because the curriculum still relies too heavily on uncritical imitation. The authority of the teacher is still absolute, many questions remain taboo subjects, and rote learning is still encouraged. Islamic society as a whole—starting with each family's father—must understand that the prerequisite for scientific progress is a climate of creative freedom of thinking which should be encouraged even at kindergarten level. There is no other path—and there is certainly no short cut—to scientific achievement.

Unfortunately, some of the suggestions for the 'Islamization' of the sciences aim in the opposite direction, and are reminiscent of the bigoted attempts of 1930s Germany to further the 'German spirit' by 'cleansing mathematics from Jewish elements' and 'setting biology on an Aryan course'. Equally naive are the demands of Muslim students that research in areas such as history, sociology, medicine, politics and biology (evolutionary theory) be bound, from the start, to 'given facts' supposedly found in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This is the wrong track.

The sciences will automatically become Islamic when devout, practicing Muslim scientists produce top results in their fields and when society as such sets its own Islamic priorities after having learned to perceive matters in a Muslim way. At any rate, the dream of the unity of all knowledge cannot replace specialization. Nor can it be realized merely by using a computer to establish a 'universal Islamic data bank' or by digitally analyzing the text of the Qur'an, as at the Institut Alif in Paris.

In short, Islamic science is a science practiced in a scientific spirit and with scientific methods by *Muslim* scientists. Any other definition is mere word fetishism or refers to something else.

Luckily the beginnings of a return to scientific curiosity in the Islamic world, particularly in the field of liberal arts (social sciences), can already be seen. Muslims of European or American origin are naturally playing an important role in this development.[28] Reference should be made here to the extraordinary contribution to Islamic research made by Leopold Weiss (alias Muhammad Asad, 1900–1992).

The dedication in his annotated translation of the Qur'an reads: "To people who think."

28. And not only in the sciences but in all fields of Islamic activities, like charity organizations, missionary work, media and civic rights, such as by Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), Malcolm X (Malik El-Shabbazz), and Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay); see the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley; M. Ali's interview with *Young Muslim*, Chicago, 1997, vol. 2, no. 2; and Steven Barboza, *American Jihad*, N.Y., NY, 1994.

# Mysticism

Although, compared to orthodox Judaism, Islam has far fewer regulations governing behavior in everyday life, to Western eyes this faith appears to be a 'lawyers' religion,' whose theologians in addition, if not as a matter of priority, have to be legal experts, because Islam tries indeed to shape and regulate the entire course of a believer's day.

This observation is correct, especially when compared to the way a modern Catholic passes his day. Nowadays, he does not encounter a single canonical hurdle from one Sunday mass to the next—the Sunday mass can even be brought forward to Saturday evening if desired. His last ritual duties, to genuinely fast or to receive Communion on an empty stomach, were long ago sacrificed to 'modern rationality'.

By contrast, the life of the Muslim is really structured by Islam from morning until night, not only by the fixed times for ritual prayer, but also by dietary regulations and rules of etiquette. These are not so much based on the Qur'an, which in actual fact only contains three or four dozen binding norms, primarily relating to family and inheritance law. Rather, the Muslim's life is regulated by the Sunnah—the Prophet's exemplary way of conduct.[1] The chapter "Islamic Jurisprudence" explains what this means for areas such as etiquette, which the Westerner would not even consider to be of a legal nature.[2]

It is all the more important that Islam sustains its proper spirituality as 'God's own religion'. This presupposes that Muslims always keep their worship of God alive, free from routine, filling their rituals with an inner life through a process of spiritualization, so that they do not ossify on an exterior level, but in the Benedictine sense rather achieve an equilibrium between action and contemplation, work and prayer.

This inner harmony of people fully oriented to the Afterlife, but with feet planted firmly on the ground of This Life was achieved in the early days of Islam by Muhammad, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, and quite a few other men and women. They were unreservedly God-fearing, ready

1. As illustrated by Ahmad von Denffer, *A Day with the Prophet*, Leicester 1981; Marwan I. Al Kaysī, *Morals and Manner in Islam*, Leicester 1986.

2. Yusuf al Qaradawi, *The Lawful and Unlawful in Islam*, IIFSO, Kuwait 1989. Available also in German and French.

to sacrifice themselves; they were ascetics, practicing the Sufi ideal of 'dying before death'—though without calling or considering themselves mystics.

Keeping God in your mind at all times (*dhikr*) with a pure heart and humility, seeing Him as the most important factor in the shaping of your own life—being a Sufi in this sense—must be the aim of *every* devout Muslim.

But Sufism means something else too: the attempt to acquire knowledge of hidden truths through following a difficult mystical path with the aim of temporarily achieving union with God.

The Naqshabandi brotherhood (which remains within the fold of Sunni Islam) describes the stages of this path in the following way to find successively:

- exterior purity through obeying the law (shari'ah);
- inner union through obeying asceticism (*tarīqah*);
- closeness to God through gnostic knowledge (*ma'rifah*); and
- union with God through reaching the truth (*ḥaqīqah*).[3]

The third and fourth steps on this ladder are problematic, in that they are steps of speculative philosophy, which, incidentally, Jewish and Christian mystics have also tried to ascend. Thus, Nicolas of Cusa, for example, described the aim of mystical theology as 'the union of Yes with No, the overcoming of the Either-Or of all philosophy, and the abandonment of the knowledge of reason in that very darkness in which the impossible becomes visible as the truly necessary'.[4]

The step called *ma'rifah* is problematic since it represents the inappropriate attempt to cross the limits of common knowledge which is based on our sensory perception, the use of reason, and revelation, and to do this in an a-rational (if not irrational) way, namely through 'illumination' in an intuitive or ecstatic manner.

This attempt is understandable as a reaction to the frustration which everyone suffers who is hungry for the truth when, thanks to uncompromising critiques of perception—whether by Kant, Wittgenstein or Popper—he or she grasps that we can comprehend the incomprehensibility of the incomprehensible, but not the incomprehensible itself; that any

3. Xavier Jacob, "Derwischorden in der heutigen Türkei," *CIBEDO*, Frankfurt 1990, no. 5/6, pp. 129–157.

4. "Das mystische Paradox," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28. 4. 1988, p. 41.

honest philosophy must renounce ontology and limit itself to a theory of knowledge.

The Sufi's unwillingness to be content with this kind of *docta ignorantia*, scholarly knowledge of our structural ignorance, is hubris, particularly in view of the warning given in verse 7 of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (3) of the Qur'an:

> **He it is Who has revealed the Book to you: some of its verses are clear in and by themselves—and these are the essence of the Book—and others are allegorical. Now as for those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth, they pursue the part of it which is allegorical, seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings. But no one knows its hidden meanings except God.**

This clearly prohibits speculation. It takes into account the fact that divine revelation in the Qur'an had to make use of human speech, that is, a man-made system of communication, which is not suited to the description of metaphysical realities except in a pictorial-allegorical way.

In other words: we are called upon (and well-advised, if we are to avoid nonsensical language games) to forgo any interpretation of metaphysical passages in the Qur'an, just as we should renounce metaphysics in the philosophical field proper.

An example of the kind of *ma'rifah* which emerges from the esoteric path of Islamic mysticism is the fascinating work of the Andalusian Al Shaykh al Akbar, Muḥyi al Dīn Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240): Islamic Gnosticism, Neoplatonism cloaked in Islamic terms.[5] The most typical examples are his cosmology, eschatology, mysticism of letters and numbers, and his exalted theory of 'The Light of Muhammad'. Here the Prophet of Islam, who rejected all this, is worshiped as God's first creation, in his luminous essence as the sun of existence, as a bearer of all secrets of that which is not manifest, as the archetype of light in the world of ideas.[6]

5. As an introduction: Ibn Arabi, *La Profession de Foi*, Paris 1985; Tilman Nagel, "Ibn al 'Arabi und das Asch'aritentum," in *Festschrift für A. Falaturi*, Cologne 1991, pp. 206ff.; Michel Chodkiewicz, *Un Océan sans Rivage*, Paris 1992; English version: *An Ocean without Shore, Ibn 'Arabi, the Book, and the Law*, N.Y., NY 1993 and his *Seal of the Saints—Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, Cambridge, UK 1993

6. Another Sufi, Frithjof Schuon goes as far as to compare Muhammad with the Logos, without which the world would not have been created; see his, *Den Islam verstehen*, Munich 1988.

Their quest for hidden truths has driven some Muslim sufis into obscurantism: Believing in the magical value of numbers or letters; others became entangled in syncretism in the attempt to understand everything and to love everyone. From Jelaladdin Rumi in medieval Konya[7] to Frithjof Schuon in this century Sufis have taught that all religions are in as much as each of them allows (only) a limited view of reality in its entirety. Thus, following Ibn al 'Arabi, Schuon even accepts the Christian Trinity in its archetypal aspect, namely, as Super-Being, Being and Existence, or Being (Father), Wisdom (Spirit) and Will (Son).

The conviction to be equipped with the capacity to 'access' unlimited transcendental knowledge, thanks to a supersensory direct vision of the invisible, easily leads to élitism, especially since it is impossible to verify or falsify intuitive cosmic knowledge. In many cases such pretension has led to personality cults centered around charismatic Sufi masters. In some cases it has even turned into Messianism.

Calling themselves Shaykh, Pir, Baba, Dede, Celebi or Marabut, those who regarded themselves as 'masters of the spiritual path' and 'men of esoteric truth' (both formulations are from Ibn al 'Arabi) not only attracted qualified disciples under the spell of their auras but many common, gullible people, too. Some of them become so dependent on their spiritual leader that they suffer from withdrawal symptoms when they feel neglected by him—a clear sign of aberration. The many highly revered domed tombs or 'Marabouts' in the Maghrib are evidence of this deviation.

The fourth step referred to above, the step of 'truth,' union, or fusion with God, is even more problematic; it creates the danger of sliding into pantheism. Whoever seeks to express inexpressible truths in antinomies is closer to pantheism that he might think: Everything is God/Nothing is God; Everything is God/God and His creation are one; God does not exist, but neither is He nonexistent.

This form of mysticism reached a sad climax in the Baghdad mystic Husain Manṣūr al Ḥallāj (857–922), a man intoxicated by God, whose mystical poems still move people today.[8] When reading that he said:

> With the eye of the heart I see my Lord and say to Him: Who are YOU? he says to me: You!

7. A brief introduction may be found in *Dschelaladdin Rumi, Aus dem Diwan,* Stuttgart 1964. Also see *Signs of the Unseen, The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi,* trans. W.M. Thackston, Jr., Putney, Vermont 1994.

8. Ḥallaj, *Poèmes mystiques,* Paris 1985.

or

His spirit is my spirit, my spirit His spirit, if he wishes, I wish, and if I wish He wishes.

It is not difficult to see that Ḥallāj was seeking martyrdom, and even provoking his execution for blasphemy. What else could he expect when writing:

I deny the religion of God; this is a duty for me, a sin for Muslims.

Kill me, authorities; for it is my life to be killed, and my death is in my life and my life in my death.

Of course Islamic mysticism does not have to go this far, it does not have to lead to this. What could be called orthodox Sufism is exemplified by the teachings of Shaykh Muhyi al Din 'Abd al Qādir Jilānī,[9] who died in 1166 and is still honored today by people inside as well as outside his Qadirīyah brotherhood. The work of Farīd al Dīn 'Aṭṭar (c. 1136–1220)[10] and Abu Ḥāmid al Ghazālī, the most important 'orthodox' Muslim Sufi (died 1111),[11] testify to Shaykh 'Abd al Qadir's universal acceptance.

At any rate, Sufism does not necessarily mean spirituality. Techniques such as the whirling or wailing of the dervishes named after these practices, even the *dhikr* prayer in the community, based on constant repetition, can degenerate into hypnosis or vulgar spectacle.[12] Discipleship can become slavish obedience.

Some brotherhoods have degenerated into the political maneuvering during periods of decadence. This happened, at the end of the Ottoman empire, amongst the Bektashi in particular, and in the Maghrib during the French occupation. Here it was Moroccan brotherhoods, (*al Wazzānīyah*) above all, who collaborated with the French.

9. Abd al Qadir Jilānī, *Futūḥ al Ghaib* (*Enthüllungen des Verborgenen*), Cologne 1985.

10. Bernd Manuel Weischer, *Die nächtlichen Gespräche des Fariduddin 'Attar*, Munich 1981.

11. In addition to his main work—*Iḥyā 'Ulūm al Dīn*—reference must here be made to Ghazali's famous *Confessions* and his purely mystical *Mishkāt al Anwār*.

12. A very graphic portrayal of the practice of *dhikr* in present-day Egypt was given by Thomas Ross in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22. 7. 1986, p. 7. I observed *dhikr* sessions of the Halveti-Jerrahi Brotherhood in Istanbul which induced toxic reactions through depriving the body of oxygen. This was achieved by repeated forceful exhalation while pronouncing the last syllable of 'Allahu'.

For all these reasons Sunni orthodoxy, embodied in the figure of Ahmad b. Taymīyah (died 1328), has adopted an attitude which is hostile to Sufis.[13]

Nevertheless, it is evident and should be acknowledged by all that Islamic mysticism has made an indispensible contribution to the increase of piety and the improvement of knowledge about Islam amongst common people. Sufism was not only a counter-weight to the dangers of an all too legalistic religion; it is thanks to Muslim brotherhoods that Islam was able to survive even under extremely hostile conditions, such as in the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union and in Communist Albania.[14]

It is now clear that mystics from all the great religions may be neatly ranked together, be it for their common achievements, be it for their common problematics—Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Angelus Silesius, Theresa of Avila alongside Hasan al Basri, al Junaid or Yahya al Suhrawardi.[15]

It would be wrong to believe that Islamic mysticism has no role to play in our rationalistic era. Quite the opposite! The great classical brotherhoods—in particular the Naqshabandīyah, who owned 450 dervish houses(tekke) in Istanbul as late as 1920—are just as alive as younger *ṭuruq* (Sufi brotherhoods). Particularly successful in the spread of Islam in West Africa was the Aḥmadīyah, founded only in the early nineteenth century by the Algerian Ahmad Tijani. Today, with its center in Fes, Morocco, it is the strongest political, economic, and social force in Senegal, before the rival Muridīyah.

It may surprise one to learn that many important Western Muslims, especially in France, have found their way to Islam via mysticism. The most famous among these is probably René Guénon (alias Shaykh 'Abd al Wahid Yahya of the Shadhiliyah brotherhood, 1886-1951), whose work *La Crise du Monde Moderne* had already been published in seven editions by 1946.[16] In England, it is Martin Lings (alias Abu Bakr

13. See Henri Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Taymiyya—La Wasitiya*, Paris 1986.

14. A good overview is to be found in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, London, 1975.

15. See Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, Munich 1990ff; Geofffrey Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions*, Rockport, MA 1995.

16. René Guénon, *La Crise du Monde moderne*, Paris 1981, edited in English as *Crisis of the Modern World.*

Sirajuddin) who was shown this path by the Algerian Shaykh al 'Alawī.[17] Among these Europeans there are those—such as Charles-André Gilis—who give themselves up to uninhibited, unlimited speculation,[18] in the face of which one can only admire how much some of our contemporaries seem to know of God and His creation.

Idries Shah's Sufi books can now be found in the esoteric section of every bookshop; and Sufi brotherhood music is found in every good record shop.[19]

Islam is, however, far from being alone in this renewed interest in the mystical. Cabbalistic Hassidism is flourishing in New York no less than in Jerusalem. And the groundswell of charismatic 'grassroots' churches in the Christian world is heading towards mysticism as well.

Background to this trend is increasing doubt, not only in rationality as an exclusive method, but also in the rationality of the Western scientific and social system: a system which has led to the two World Wars, Stalinism, the employment of nuclear weapons, environmental disaster, and underdevelopment: A system which did not even prevent the Holocaust. The current young generation has exposed the ideology of progress espoused by the so-called 1968 generation to be pure pathos.

Modern micro- and macrophysics prepared the ground for this rebellion against scientism when, at the beginning of the present century, this science—whose key words are 'quantum theory' and 'the uncertainty principle'—first moved beyond classical physics and then came up against fresh systematic limits to the expansion of knowledge, and, indeed, the mystical.[20]

At any rate, one gets the impression that many young people want to correct rationalistic blunders by embarking on another course equally bound to fail—the escape into irrationality, with total surrender to new myths, following the motto: "It is so nice to obey blindly!"[21]

17. See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaykh Ahmad al Alawi*, Cambridge, UK 1993; Johan Cartigny, *Cheikh al Alawi*, Paris 1984. He lived in Mostaganem (Algeria) earlier this century.

18. See, for example, Charles-André Gilis, *Marie en Islam*, Paris 1990.

19. See Alfons Hirth, "Musik der . . . Sufi-Bruderschaften," in *Fono-Forum* 4/1991; of Idries' many works we refer only to *The Sufis* (1964).

20. It is worth while reading Gaston Bachelard, *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique*, Paris 1934; Henri Atlan, *A tort et à raison—Intercritique de la science et du mythe*, Paris 1986; Hans-Peter Dürr (ed), *Physik und Transzendenz*, Berne 1989.

21. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Es ist so schön, sich zu fügen, Hinwendung zum Mystizismus—ein Generationsproblem," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*—supplement to no. 248 of 25. 10. 1986.

Eugen Biser sees another mechanism behind this: modern man's abolition of sin, among other things, through 'structural exculpation'. One useful method of such exculpation is the adoption of personal convictions as a moral standard *(Gesinnungsethik)*, as if good intentions could sanctify the methods and results of any action. But despite this modern man still fails to achieve his 'salvation'. In fact, as it turns out, he has only replaced his earlier problem of guilt with his new problem of suffering from the meaninglessness of his existence. In turn, this has led to the current 'religious proliferation' with its anti-intellectual attitude, i.e., a tendency towards fundamentalism and/or mysticism. According to Karl Rahner, we may extrapolate from all this that "the Christian of the future will be a mystic or not at all."[22] I believe that the issue is somewhat different: can a mystic, equipped with the Neoplatonic theory of ontological oneness and the Neoplatonic emanation theory, remain in any sense a believer in the Trinity and the Christian concept of creation?

At any rate, alongside Rahner's alternatives there is a third logical option: to become a Muslim, thereby marrying rationality with the non-sensual reality.

22. Eugen Biser, "Fundamentalismus und Mystik: Christentum im Widerspruch der Gegenwart," *Die Presse*, Vienna, 18/19. 3. 1989.

# FATALISM

The relevant entry in *The Columbia Encyclopedia* states that Islam "teaches an absolute predestination." In fact, Westerners almost universally believe that Islam is fatalistic.

The stereotype media image of the Muslim who has quietly surrendered to his fate, regarding everything as *kismet* or *maktūb,* and who sits in weary resignation in front of his hut, motionless, squinting into the sun, is quite popular. But it perpetuates a misconception.

True, however, is that Muslims have remained uncommonly conscious of the problems associated with the concepts of 'predestination' and 'free will'. Christianity is also essentially deterministic with its doctrine of original sin, but if anything, it has marginalized the entire issue—as if it could escape coping with it.

On the basis of their (in this respect identical) image of God, the fundamental and highly troubling question arises in both religions of how God's omnipotence and omniscience may be logically reconciled with man's responsibility for his own actions, that is to say, with man's free will (*arbitrium liberum*).

The dilemma is as follows:

*Either* God is the cause of all action; in which case, man is not responsible for his deeds, and it would contradict divine justice to punish him;

*Or* man is the cause of his own action; in which case, God is not Creator and Lord of all that happens.

For a long time Christianity tried hard to resolve this dilemma. With its doctrine of grace, e.g., salvation by God's 'eternal choice'—or not at all—it tended, with Augustine, Zwingli, Calvin and the Jansenists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, towards a radical concept of predestination. Thomas Aquinas, too, whose scholasticism became orthodoxy itself, considered God as the cause of all events. He maintained, however, that His foreknowledge did not imply the inevitability of the concrete course of events. Rather, he suggested that man's free will, as concretely manifested in history, was 'integrated' into God's overall plan of salvation.

But this terminological game could not solve the problem. It merely reformulated it in a way which flattered human experience and ambition. The problem of predestination was even more radically 'solved' in Europe and North America after the Enlightenment. Since then, the virtually absolute freedom of choice, as postulated by the 'autonomous individual,' was accepted as plausible, simply because it corresponded to the masses' new awareness of liberty and freedom. Free will is 'experienced' and no longer questioned. It is regarded as obscurantism if one wonders whether there was not at least some limited form of predetermination—if only by our genes—despite the fact that free will, like its opposite, cannot be scientifically proved. (In the absence of God, of course, theological problems disappear all by themselves.)

In Islam, too, there have been, and still are, various attempts to solve the problem of predestination logically.

In contrast to the belief in complete predestination (held by the *Jabrīyah* school), which manifested itself at an early period of Islam, the *Mu'tazilah* school of philosophy taught free will in Baghdad as early as the ninth century. According to this school, God created the latent ability in man to be a cause of actions. Thus, human action had two causes: one which could be attributed to God, the other to man. It is not in the least surprising that such positions should be revived in the modern era by modernists such as al Afghani (1839–1897)[1] or contemporary neo-Mu'tazilites.

A truly Islamic examination of the question of free will requires a closer examination of the Qur'an and is, therefore, more complex. It takes as a starting-point the image of God, derived from His description of Himself. As is well known, God's 'most beautiful names' (7:180) are (mostly) taken from the Qur'an,[2] and are said to number 99.[3] (The most important name, i.e., attribute, is not among them because it transcends human understanding.) Names refer to essential characteristics—and on no account to persons: They describe aspects, or facets of God and ways in which He manifests Himself. Thus we get to know Him as

• the All-Knowing (*al 'Ālim, al Khabīr, al Muḥīṭ, al Muḥṣī, al Ḥasīb, al Samī', al Baṣīr, al Mudrik*) Who knows everything;

1. See p. 49 ff. in Arnold Hottinger, *Allah heute*, Zurich 1981.

2. Daniel Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*, Paris 1988; Abu Hamid al Ghazali, *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al Dīn*, Vol. 1, Book 2 of the *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith* series, Lahore 1974.

3. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Ch. 1117, hadith no. 6475.

• the Almighty (*al Qādir, al Qawī, al Qāhir, al Ghālib, al 'Azīz, al Jabbār*);

• the Creator *ex nihilo* and Preserver of all things (*al Khāliq, al Bārı', al Muṣawwir, al Jā'il, al Ṣāni', al Mūjid*), i.e., the original cause of everything (*al Fā'il, al 'Āmil, al Mubdi'*);

• the absolute Ruler and Master of everything (*al Malik, al Rabb, al Ṣamad*);

• the Punisher (*al Muntaqim*);

• the Just (*al 'Ādil, al Ḥākam*);

• the Kindly, the Mild One, the Forgiving, the Merciful (*al Raḥmān, al Raḥīm, al Muḥsin, al Mutafaḍḍil, al Laṭīf, al Ghaffār, al Ṭawwāb*), the Protector and Friend of the believer (*al Walī, al Mawla*), the Fountain of Love (11:90); the Loving (85:14, 3:31 and 5:54).

This utterly complex image of God highlights the difficulties with the problem of predestination outlined above, a problem mirrored in seemingly contradictory statements throughout the Qur'an.

On the one hand there are dozens of Qur'anic verses from which we may conclude that God—closer to the believer than his jugular vein (50:16)—is the Lord of all events. As al Ghazali said in the twelfth century, "He knows the crawling of the ant on a rock in the darkest night . . . . What He wills is, and what He does not will is not . . . . No one can reject His fate."[4] This point of view can be found in verses such as the following:

**And whomsoever God wishes to guide, He expands his breast for Islam, and whom He wishes to go astray, He makes his breast tight and narrow . . . thus does God inflict horror on those who will not believe. (6:125)**

**God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing. (2:7)**

**Yet if We had so willed, We would certainly have imposed Our guidance upon every human being. (32:13)**

**And certainly We have destined for hell many of the . . . men. (7:179)**

4. See his "Confession of faith," in Hottinger, *op. cit.*, p. 26; and also his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al Dīn, op. cit.*, section 4.

**He cannot be questioned concerning what He does, whereas they shall be questioned. (21: 23)**

Reading such verses out of context it is possible to reach the conclusion that Allah is an arbitrary God who "**chastises whom He wills**" (3:129), regardless of whether people deserve it, and that all this is eternally fixed.

Yet the Qur'an contains just as many verses which seem to say exactly the opposite, and which are the basis for the moral teachings of Islam. These include:

**But as for him who believes and does good, he shall have goodly reward . . .' (18:88)**

**God would never lead a people astray after He has guided them . . . (9:115)**

**Say: If I err, I err only due to my own self . . . (34:50).**

In view of such widely diverging statements the overriding tendency within Islam since the tenth century has been that, from a human standpoint, there is a dichotomy regarding the nature of God. The question of free will or predestination, which cannot be solved by means of human logic, is a dichotomy which we must simply put up with, despite the perplexities associated with it.

This position was formulated by the anti-Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite school of philosophy and expressed in the traditional 'confession of faith' of Abu al Hasan al Ash'ari (874–935).[5] He called for the acceptance of such mysteries of faith as revealed, without asking 'how' and without seeking comparisons in the human domain (*bilā kayf wa bilā tashbīh*). The greatest Egyptian reformist theologian of our century, Muhammad 'Abdu, adhered to this in his chief work *Risālat al Tawḥīd* (1897): "The attempt to reconcile the Omniscience of God and His Will . . . with man's freedom to act is an attempt to penetrate the secrets of God."[6]

This approach, which appears almost agnostic in its humility, has the Sunnah of the Prophet on its side. He expressly warned against hair-splitting theological speculation—particularly on this subject.[7]

5. See Hottinger, *op. cit.*, p. 17 f.

6. Muhammad Abdou, *Rissālat al Tawḥīd*, Paris 1984, p. 43; similarly Hamidullah, *Der Islam*, Geneva 1968, para 121.

7. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Ch 1113, Hadith no. 6450.

If we look closer, however, neither al Ash'ari nor al Ghazali nor Muhammad 'Abdu adhered to their epistemological doctrine. All three actually made a vain attempt to reconcile free will with God's Omnipotence in a logical and conceptual way. Al Ash'ari's notion of 'acquisition' (*kasb/iktisāb*) was epoch-making. According to this concept God is the only cause or creator of all human actions, but man can 'acquire' merit (or the opposite) from his deeds. To quote al Ash'ari: "The true meaning of acquisition is the occurrence of an event or a thing due to derived power; for the person by whose derived power it occurs, it is an acquisition." He probably meant by this that, in reality, God alone is the agent in human action, and determines the outcome, but that a person can earn merit or guilt through the mental attitude accompanying the action.[8] If so al Ash'ari simply pushed the issue into the psychological field, opening up the question—again unanswerable—of whether man is free to adopt a mental attitude or not.

Al Ghazali took this concept and, in my view, pushed it a little further in the direction of free will.

> God, the only cause of the action of His creatures, does not prevent them from accomplishing willful actions through acquisition (*al maqdurah*); for God created will (*al qudrah*) and that which is willed (*al maqdūr*), the ability to choose as well as that which is chosen. . . . How can acquired actions be completely attributed to inevitability (*al jabr*), when everyone instinctively understands the difference between voluntary and involuntary (*al ḍarūri*) reflexes?[9]

This, then, is the result of Muslim attempts to come to terms intellectually with the paradox of predestination, without obscuring parts of the admittedly ambivalent, revelation and without exaggerating in either of the two possible directions. If nothing else, then, Muslims have at least developed a greater consciousness of the problem. It is one thing to be unable to solve a problem and quite another to sweep it under the carpet.

Surprisingly, this stance has been rehabilitated by the findings of modern physics. As has been well known since Werner Heisenberg's discovery of the uncertainty principle in 1925, physics has learned to describe

8. For details see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, London 1983, p. 208; and M. Abdul Hye, "Ash'arism," in M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Wiesbaden 1963, p. 220ff, esp. pp. 229f.

9. See footnote 4, *loc. cit.*, pp. 78f; 'Al Afghani', in Hottinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 49ff. agreed with him.

inner-atomic reality not using alternative but *complementary* states (particles versus waves). It was discovered that particle physics can be better grasped using the Islamic theory of predestination, i.e., its concept of simultaneously determined and undetermined behavior. And, by the same token, Muslims—as Ulrich Schoen has shown—can point out that their own attempts to explain a theological and scientific problem (the problem of causality as a part of the problem of predestination) can no longer be belittled as medieval obscurantist nonsense.[10]

What does this mean in Muslim practice?

Like the Christian and the practicing Marxist (who, if he takes his historical materialism seriously, should actually be a fatalist), the Muslim attempts to achieve his aims in life according to the motto: "Help yourself and God will help you."

He feels personal responsibility for his actions and his omissions. He trusts that God will reward him for his good deeds—not because God is obliged to, but because He denies Himself injustice.[11] The Muslim fears punishment for bad deeds, although he knows of God's mercy and readiness to forgive. Because he is aware that at the end of the day everything is in God's hands, he begins every deed in His name—*bismi-lLāhi!* (in the name of God)—leaving success up to Him—*in sha'a Allah!* (if God is willing)—and attributing every success to Him—*ma sha'a Allah* (as God wishes/wished). Thus he feels protected by the Providence of God, to whom he will, of course, return at the end of his days (10:40).

Only if a Muslim suffers misfortune or if, despite all his attempts a project fails, does his *kismet* attitude come to the fore; he will not despair, will not tear out his hair or rip his clothes, but will recognize and accept that what has happened was *maktūb* (preordained).

> **And no one . . . has his life lengthened nor . . . diminished . . ., but it is all in a book. (35:11)**

As Muhammad Asad observed, Islamic 'fatalism' does not refer to the *future,* but to that which has already occurred, to the past.

10. Ulrich Schoen, *Determination und Freiheit im arabischen Denken heute,* Göttingen, 1976; see also Hans-Peter Dürr (ed.) *Physik und Transzendenz,* Berne 1986.

11. *Vierzig Heilige Hadite,* Munich 1987 (translated by A. von Denffer), Hadith no. 17.

# About the Author

Murad Wilfried Hofmann was born into a Catholic family on 6 July 1931 in Aschaffenburg, Germany, where he spent the war years, experiencing strategic bombing and military occupation. His university studies began in 1950 at Union College in Schenectady, New York. He completed his studies of German law with a doctorate in jurisprudence at Munich University (1957) and his bar exam. His subsequent studies of American law led to a master's degree at Harvard Law School (1960).

From 1961 until 1994, he was a member of the German foreign service and a specialist on issues of nuclear defense. He also served as Director of Information for NATO at Brussels (1983-87), Ambassador to Algeria (1987-90), and Ambassador to Morocco (1990-94).

In 1980, the author embraced Islam, performing 'umrah in 1982 and hajj in 1992. In 1985, he published the German version of his *Diary of a German Muslim* (2d ed., Cologne: 1990), which is available in Arabic (*Yawmiyāt Muslim Almānī* [Cairo: al Ahram 1993]), English (*Diary of a German Muslim* [Cologne: 1987]), and French *Journal d'un Musulman allemand* [Alger: 1990; Rabat: 1993]).

His book, *Islam: The Alternative*, when appearing in German in 1992 (2d ed., Munich: 1993), caused a public scandal. Mr. Hofmann was viciously attacked as a "fundamentalist" by leftist and feminist circles in the German media and parliament. This book is also available in Arabic (*al Islām ka Badīl* [Munich and Kuwait: 1993]) and English (*Islam: The Alternative* [Reading: Garnet 1993; and amana publications 1997]).

The English version of the author's latest book, *Voyage to Makkah*, is forthcoming by amana publications.

Mr. Hofmann has a son from his late (American) first wife. Upon retirement, he took up residence in Istanbul, home of his Turkish wife.

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