any religion, e.g. Islam makes an absolute truth claim about its understanding of God, such a claim is made from the point of view of human understanding (reason) guided by God through revelation. Certainly no human being can know the Absolute in its Absoluteness. But with the aid of reason and revelation or religious experience one can approximate to the Absolute Reality. Such approximation can become the basis of one's religious life. If one is not convinced rationally in one's own mind about a certain truth, one cannot live peacefully in accordance with it. But when one is convinced one justifiably feels a strong urge to share it with others and invite them to accept it.

And finally, Hick’s claim is not correct that all religious traditions believe in, and respond to the One, Ultimate, e.g. to Sat in Hinduism, Yahweh in Judaism, Triune God in Christianity, al-Haqq in Islam, etc. Except Muslims, only some philosophers and intellectuals of various other traditions believe in the Transcendental, the Absolute; or the Ultimate. A common believer of a Hindu tradition, for example, does not believe in one God Brahma, but in many gods; and he responds to those gods also. Similarly a common Christian believes that Christ was God incarnate, and thus invokes him also in his prayers. A common Buddhist also believes and responds to Buddha as a God. Lay men of these religions are not monotheists in their attitudes. They do not always respond to the Ultimate, in their prayers and worships. The case is different in Islam where both a lay religionist and an intellectual believe in one God, and respond to Him only.

The Rainbow of Faiths, in any case, is an earnest effort in interfaith dialogue and needs to be appreciated for the author’s clarity of arguments and his sincerity in understanding his own and other religions in an objective spirit. As a philosopher of religion Hick works with a remarkable hermeneutical insight. As a theologian his contribution to Chirtianity’s new self-understanding will definitely be significant in promoting interfaith understanding and will also be a valuable check to narrow sectarianism in different religious cultures. His conclusion regarding global religion and religious pluralism will however remain a subject of dispute. Hick is aware of the unlikelihood of complete success of his project in this vast world of multi-dimensional religious cultures. But he is justifiably hopeful that his efforts will bring fruits by at least transforming the religious visions of people in a positive way and will help them in understanding their own and other religions in a more objective light and appreciative spirit.

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Arifa Farid


Time and again one has to observe, with much sadness, that Muslims from the Islamic world — born Muslims, exposed to Islam from childhood on — are usually quite unable to effectively communicate their faith to the Western world. A prime example of this evident failure, among many others, is Shawki Abu Khaleel’s book *Islam on Trial* (Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir, Beirut, 1991): well researched, well intended, and — wide off the mark. Why? Because Occidental people do not "tick" that way. In order to reach them, a dā‘i has to keep account of their entire mental development, their historical hang-ups, and their atheistic (not Christian) frame of mind.

Against this background, the two books by Dr Jeffrey Lang (43), mathematics professor at the University of Kansas — first married to a Jewish woman and now to a lady from Saudi Arabia — are nothing less than a blessing for Islam in the West. Formerly a Catholic, Lang arrived at his submission to Islam through a protracted, twisted, and excruciatingly difficult way, virtually pulled, willy nilly — a process neatly echoed by the title of his first book. As a result, there is not one practical aspect of Islam, as taught and as practiced, which has not been thoroughly examined and absorbed — or rejected — by Jeffrey Lang, the convert.

His honest insistence on clear evidence might be expected from a mathematician. What comes as a surprise is his pronounced talent for writing. In fact, both books alternate between beautifully painted vignettes of biographic events and the author’s subsequent reflections on them, solidly based on the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. This is a point worth-while making because many a Western convert all but shuns the Hadīth.

Lang is fully conscious of the problems posed to Western Muslims by modern *Aḥl al-Sunnah*. Firstly, full access to the Qur’ān is still easier than full access to the voluminous *Hadīth* collections. (This might, of course, change with the availability of the *Hadīth* on CD-Rom and as PC software). Secondly, it can not be denied that the system of *isnād* does not in itself guarantee the genuineness of a tradition. Thirdly, there is evidence of large-scale forgery of *ahādīth*, both of *isnād* and *matn*. Fourthly, Western converts come from religious traditions in which similar material (the Old and the New Testament) has been rejected by Christian authors. Given these facts, Lang goes into a very open and logical critique of famous *Hadīth* sceptics like Goldziher, Schacht and Juynboll (pp. 78–118).

He arrives at the reassuring conclusion that "the authenticated hadith are, after the Qur’ān, the most faithful source of information ever compiled on the life of any prophet or teacher of any of the great world religions" (p. 104). But he also warns against the uncritical assumption that no error could have slipped into the collections called "*ṣahīh*". If they were free from error, by definition, he argues, how could one ignore the "Satanic Verses" incident as reported by al-Bukhārī (p. 114)?
Do not be fooled by the seemingly traditional division of his first book into chapters like The Shahādah, the Qur‘ān, Rasūl Allāh, The Ummah, Women in the Qur‘ān, Law and State, Ahl al-Kitāb, and of his second book into chapters corresponding to the Five Pillars of Islam. The excitement comes when you realize that Lang makes you see old acquaintances in a new, favourable — and yet correct — light.

Fundamental for both books is Lang’s starting point, i.e. the religious attitude of the Arabs at Muhammad’s time (peace be on him) was very different from what we experience in the Occident today. People in Makkah had not really been atheistic or agnostic; only, their way of being religious had been quite superficial. Religion simply had become "one part of a larger tradition, a cultural appendage, that had its limited time and place and could be called upon when needed" (p. 21). Consequently, the Qur‘ān’s problem with the Arabs was not their lack of belief in God but their false beliefs about God.

According to Dr Lang — and I share his views — the situation in contemporary Western society is almost exactly the opposite, and this explains my opening observation about the inadequacy of much Muslim missionary effort. Indeed, in the West there is no longer any requirement to explain man and his cosmos through religion. Natural science and psychology are (supposedly) doing that, and Western philosophy, reduced to epistemology concurs. People are disinclined to accept anything as definite or absolute or timeless or binding. Against this background, Lang vigorously travelled up-stream — "from individualism to traditionalism, from learning to illumination, from the sensible to the unseen, from reason to intuition".

On this road, the Qur‘ān did not just serve as a text for Lang but virtually became his partner in a dialogue. His is the case of many a Western Muslim who, al-hamdulillāh, has literally been converted by Allah’s Word — proving it to be as effective today as it was when it struck `Umar. In Lang’s words, the Qur‘ān had "sneaked up" on him and "become a mirror in which you see your flaws, weaknesses, pain and loss, potential and failures" (p. 65).

In the process, he copes with the Qur’ānic statements on scientific aspects (e.g., the mummification of Pharaoh; al-*alāq in 76: 2; embryonic development, 23:1; the female gender of bees, 16:68; the process of alternation between day and night, 7:54, etc.; the expansion of the universe, 51:47; creation from hydrogen, 21:30) but also with all major revealed aspects of the Unseen (heaven and hell; devils and jinn; eternity; predetermination; prophethood). In this context he observes that due to a mere difference of focus, the image of the prophet of Islam in the Qur‘ān differs remarkably from his image derived from the Sunnah — a typical example of the originality of the author’s approach.

One condition for the credibility of a Muslim dā‘ī in the West is that he freely admits mistakes and deviations on his, the Muslim, side. Self-criticism is indeed a conditio sine qua non, and Lang excels in this virtue. There is in fact no other way. If we do not face squarely the ugly realities of certain "Islamic" practices, we risk that Islam will slip either into a mere (Sufi) dream or, in the Occident, into insignificance (p. 129).

Lang is right when he states that "in no sphere of Muslim life the tension between traditional and modern ideas is so pronounced as in that of the roles of
men and women" (p. 138). Lang bravely endorses the almost forgotten and highly unpopular fact that men and women are not alike (3:36) and therefore have different roles to play (pp. 147–167). But he deplores that the essential equality between men and women, as stated in the Qur'an, has not been upheld by important Muslim scholars all through the ages — even while all women mentioned in the Qur'an are highly positive figures — the Queen of Sheba; Pharaoh's wife; the mother of Moses; the mother of Mary; Mary. This is not all so as far as men in the Qur'an are concerned (p. 146). As a result of such negative attitudes, American convert women frequently sense that they are not even wanted in their mosque!

Frequently following interpretations suggested by Muhammad Asad, in his ground-breaking Qur'an translation (1980), Lang considers that

- the right of women to sue for divorce should be better implemented in practice;
- *al-Nisā*: 3 should be understood only to allow additional marriages either with orphan girls or in order to solve the problem of fatherless households (p. 163);
- female witnesses should be allowed in court on equal terms, provided they have the necessary educational background (p. 167, with reference to Fazlur Rahman);
- the doubtful habit of segregation based on gender should not be enforced in the West.

He does, however, not follow Muhammad Asad in his interpretation of 24:31 and 33:59. Instead, he considers the covering of a Muslim woman's hair as a religious obligation, regardless of the cultural environment. He foresees that it will be some time before American and European Muslim women will develop fashions that harmonize with their culture and their religion (p. 176).

Equally important are Lang's positions on political aspects. He rightly considers Islam and secularism as irreconcilable but — equally correctly — adds that secularism and democracy are not synonyms. In fact democracy does not imply the exclusion of religious conviction from government. Therefore "the word 'secular', when applied to most Western democracies, is something of a misnomer" (p. 191). Lang admits that currently modern democratic republic seem to be doing the best job of protecting individual (human) rights. This is underlined by his observation that Muslims are frequently freer to practice their faith in the West than in their countries of origin. In fact, like many of us, Lang does not find anywhere in today's world the model of an Islamic State on which the ummah could agree (p. 192). Therefore, he — like most American and European Muslims — sees no Islamic mandate to dismantle the existing democratic systems of government.

This (first) book terminates with a series of most pertinent remarks about the Muslim-Christian and Muslim-Jewish dialogue, including a concise passage on the issue of Palestine, refuting the Jewish historical claim to that territory. *Even Angels Ask*, Dr Lang's second book — written after a year's (not so happy) stay in Saudi Arabia — shows the same virtues as the first one: total
honesty; common sense; a rigorous level of theological investigation; and the same thrilling oscillation between gifted story telling and exposition of doctrine. Again, the author demonstrates that, not only as a mathematician, he can only believe in a religion that he finds "compelling, rationally, intellectually, and spiritually", and that Islam is that very religion: a thinking man's faith.

When the author alleges that Christian religious dogmas in modern times are only deepening the crisis of faith and religion, he echoes a prediction made by Muhammad Asad (Islam at the Crossroads) in 1934 when he foresaw that the doubts raised by the Nicene Creed, especially the notions of incarnation and trinity, would not only alienate thinking people from their churches but from the belief in God as such. He is also in line with an observation made by Karen Armstrong (On God) according to which Jewish monotheism could be maintained, but would not spread, because the Israelites closed themselves off (Israel as the Chosen People) while Christianity suffered from the opposite, a dilution of its monotheism as a result of its universality (absorbing a multitude of traditions). Islam, according to the author, is positioned to avoid both pitfalls, and one but agrees with him. The doctrine of tawḥīd remained intact, and Islam nevertheless avoided isolation.

In Saudi Arabia, the author came to realize that for him "there was no escape from being an American", i.e. an investigative Muslim, and that over there his way of inquiry into the bases of Islam was considered dangerous, suspected of leading to "innovation" or even heresy. (To put the reader's mind to rest: There is not a single instance in which the author's approach leads to even the slightest deviation from the tenets of Islam.) This ultra-conservative attitude of orthodox `ulamā`, identifying Wahhabism with Islam as such, encountered overseas by Lang, years earlier had affected Muhammad Asad, regardless of the fact that he was one of the leading Muslim minds of this century. In my view, he would certainly have endorsed both books whole-heartedly!

Given this background, the second book's title is not just an opening gambit but programmatic. If, according to al-Baqarah: 30, even the angels were moved to question God's wisdom of creating rebellious and mischievous man, Muslims too, gifted by Allah with the power of reasoning, must never stop asking pertinent questions about God, the world, and themselves. Nevertheless, in view of the opposite view, it takes some courage for Lang to hold that every new generation of Muslims is obliged to re-investigate the foundations of their faith "since knowledge grows with time". As a matter of fact, he thinks that it would be a grave mistake to rely blindly on past judgments and to "dogmatize opinion", unless one were to accept structural "atrophy and decay".

This mistake the author is not going to commit. On the contrary, also in the second book he tackles head-on many rather delicate issues, like questions about free will and theodicy. He offers no solutions to these problems but rather points out, like Immanuel Kant ("Critique of Pure Reason") before him, that they cannot be solved since they result from man's captivity in his own mind's categories of time and space, which help to bar his access to the Ultimate Reality. Thus the author lifts insoluble problems to a higher level of awareness. More cannot be asked.
Even more important, however, is his substantial critique of Muslim shortcomings, both inside the United States and abroad. In particular, in *Even Angels Ask* he denounces:

* Sub-cultural trends within the American Muslim community, lack of tolerance between Muslim schools of thought;
* dominance of Middle Eastern and Arabic features of merely cultural, not religious, significance;
* over-focusing on non-essential, marginal aspects of the Islamic way of life — instead of looking for the general ethical and spiritual lessons of the Prophet's *Sunnah*;
* systematic distrust shown by "native" Muslims towards contributions by Western converts.

Jeffrey Lang wrote this book "first and foremost" for his children — leading them through the Qur'ān in an eye-opening way and introducing them to the five pillars of Islamic worshipping in a manner which stresses spirituality rather than legalistic routine. In that, he has done a tremendous service once more to all Muslim parents in the United States. All those many who are often wondering, worrying and fretting whether in a permissive, consumerist and drug-oriented society it is possible to transmit their faith to the next generation.

In this respect, the author seems to be somewhat pessimistic. I, however, am inclined to see things in a more optimistic light — if only for one reason: There are now two good books which just might move the scales in favour of Islam in the West. They are called *Struggle to Surrender* and *Even Angels Ask*, and both are by Jeffrey Lang!

Murad Wilfried Hofmann


The period which consists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was an era of radical changes in the Ottoman Empire. The changes that occurred in the economy, education, political and administrative structures constituted a radical shift. The whole structure was like a wagon departing from one place to another. The aim of this essay, taking this context into consideration, is to build a