
The conflict between Islam and Christianity is as old as the date of the first formal contact between the two great nations, i.e. the early seventh century when the Prophet (peace be on him) sent letters to Christian princes inviting them to the fold of Islam. The Christians found in the emergence of Islam a challenge to their religion, let alone their political power. Centuries have passed and man has made momentous progress in all fields of activity and the conflict between the two religions has also assumed certain familiar forms, the more moderate persons on both sides tend to make declarations of respect to the other’s faith, even if they might embark on a killing spree. However, the inherent suspicions against each other has lingered on. Can the Christian and the Muslim worlds be regarded as monoliths? Nothing would be farther from the truth. But equally misleading would it be to deride the singular impact that the rivalry between the crescent and the cross has had, and continues to have, on the ever-changing geopolitical landscape of the globe. From the pictures of the havoc caused in New York on Sept. 11, 2001, to the scenes of blood and fire on the streets of Baghdad on April 9, 2003, everything tends to indicate the direction of the plot in the foreseeable future.

The relationship between the two great civilizations has always been a mixture of awe and admiration, of conflict and competition, and of love and hate, and yet each yearning to know more about the ‘other’. One can count on and on, yet the list of contradictions characterizing the interaction seems never to end.

Yet the conflict itself is not as much of an enigma as are the two terms ‘jihād’ and ‘crusade’ that signify it. As for the first, the book under review bravely attempts to solve the problems relating to it. It is interesting to note that the term jihād was used by the Muslims to denote their acts of violence against the Christians less occasionally than the latter used it for the same. The
same holds true for the word ‘crusade’ which seems more of a phobia for the Muslims than it is the commitment of the large masses of the present-day Christians.

Jihād, undoubtedly, is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the contemporary political lexicon. Literally meaning “to struggle”, it is no more than a sublime, innocuous call to stand for the truth by reforming one’s own self first and then the world around oneself. Granted that the term has various connotations, yet while wildest stretch of imagination may extend its meaning to “an invitation to die” for a just cause but not to “an invitation to kill” for it. It was only in the recent years that the concept of “holy war” started being attributed to jihād.

So what is jihād? How do we interpret the term correctly? And which of the present wars may be aptly described as jihād? In my view, convincing answers have been provided in the book The Shade of Swords. The topic being sensitive, no non-Muslim author on the subject could have been immune from the criticism of being biased. Authored by M. J. Akbar, an outstanding scholar and a Muslim, the principal worth of the book lies in its remarkable objectivity of approach and the relative immunity from its vulnerability to another intellectual crusade to malign jihād.

The book is a fruit of intense research spanning over twelve years and involving visits to “that great swathe between Cordoba in Spain to Mecca in the Arabian peninsula”, where the History is far from dead, or rather, as the author wonders, “dead are not far from the History” (p. xi). The imposing minarets of the mosques that have changed the skylines all along the Central Asia in the recent years and the bellowing angry voices from the pulpits from Baku to Bali, have convinced him that Islam is a religion with a worldview which sometimes startles the world that would have expected such unity of response on basic issues all over the Islamic world, to be a divided one on the basis of preferred blocs of nationalism” (p. x).

While claiming that jihād stands out through its ability to change the tides of history, as events in the past couple of years amply demonstrate, the author seeks to explain the origin and nature of both “the battle and the battlefield”. Why the Muslims and the Christians started hating each other (or do they really do?) And how and when did the antipathy spill into the realms of literature, rhetoric and art? Admittedly, the wounds inflicted by pen and tongue remained more permanent than those received on the battlefields (p. xiv).

Islam has recognized the reality of war in human affairs and has set its moral and political compass. It is, therefore, a truism that the fundamental text of Islam — the Qur’ān — refers to war and peace; but these definitions are
subject to abuse as they are to use. The author has succeeded in resisting the
temptation to reinterpret the text and history to suit the contemporary
‘politically correct’ requirements, a goal that the author had set for the book
in its Introduction (See p. xv).

The book takes to task the various international actors that have
employed jihād for their ends. The notion of jihād found unlikely mentors and
met with strange bedfellows: the Americans who found it convenient in
Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, the Saudis who named their
country after their family lest anyone forgets that it was, after all, a family
affair, the Turks where the armed forces took upon themselves to protect the
secular ideology as if the whole electorate could not be trusted to do so, the
Pakistanis who found that the Islamists jihādis were more of a threat to its own
polity than to the nations they sought to subdue, and of course, Qaddafi and
Asad who were selective in support of jihād conducted by the organizations
that could be sacrificed if they failed and owned if they succeeded. All of them
have patronized jihād somewhere sometime. I have not purposefully used the
words Libyans and Syrians in the last-mentioned example, as in these regimes,
the actions of the government do not necessarily, represent their people’s
collective will.

The book makes a foray to spot the true colours of jihād from the
plethora of mantles that various self-serving interests have made it don. The
work explores the texts of the Qur‘ān and the Hadith to bring home what
Islam itself meant by jihād. Islam, as the word implies, does not seek violence,
but is equally unpermitting for a meek surrender (p. 2). It is not a sanction to
empire-building, though empires did emerge in its wake. The most powerful
manifestation of jihād is not when all is won, but rather when all seems lost
(p. 3) as in the battles of Badr and Karbalā’. Islam does not sanction forcing
others to its fold but the giving away of one’s own life for the supremacy of
the noble values, or the martyrdom, as a direct key to paradise, has always
been glorified so that it became a “romance and a conviction” (p. 8).

The author traces the history of conflict right from the campaign of
Tabūk (9/631) when the Prophet (peace be on him) himself led over 30,000
Muslims to check the Roman satrap of Damascus who was said to have been
planning to invade the Madīnā. This was the first time that Muslims came
close to an armed engagement with Christians. In the long run, Muslims
entered Christian Europe from the far West at Gibralter (92/712) and,
following seven centuries of abortive attempts, from the East at
Constantinople (857/1453). In the intervening period, the two sides locked
horns during the crusade wars.
The book also contains, in graphic detail, the historic competition for the control of the holy city of Jerusalem. How the disunity of the Muslims resulted in the city being taken over by the crusaders in 492/1099 and then why the ‘disunity’ became the problem of the Christians in the next half century is an interesting subject of historical enquiry. It was presumably the closing of the Muslim ranks under the able and inspiring leadership of Salāh al-Dīn (589/1193) which enabled them to eventually recapture the prized city in 583/1186.

Light has also been shed on the Muslim-Christian interaction in another part of the world by detailing the scenario in South Asia. We are told about the contact of the European traders with the Mughal emperors, the savagery and exploits of the Portuguese explorers, and finally the East India Company’s engagements with the forces of Nawāb Sirāj al-Dawlah (d. 1170/1757) in Bengal. Also of interest is the account of the forward policy of the British and their turbulent relations with Afghanistan.

The book brings the discussion to the present times and convincingly shows that it is the sense of political powerlessness and of economic deprivation that is resulting in the heightening of frustration among the Muslims. Most of the Muslim leaders are believed to be agents of the West who have virtually sold out the national interests of their countries to the West, in return for ‘job security’, i.e. the promise that the Americans would not disturb them as long as they do not pose a threat to the latter’s interests.

Osama bin Laden had a safe and comfortable life in Saudi Arabia when he himself chose to become an international pariah and wage, what he believed, was a holy war against the United States. He became an instant hero among the Muslim youth, with his posters and pictures selling like hot cakes in the streets of the Muslim countries. It is owing to the inspiration provided by ideologues like him that the politics of the Islamists have been radicalized in many regions such as Palestine, Kashmir, Chechenya, etc. in recent years.

It is interesting to note that the type of frustrations that the Muslim masses feel today when they see the affluence of the Western societies, the nature of the grudge they hold against the West and the way they idolize the ‘martyrs’ in the war against the West, is not much different from how the Christian world used to behave a few centuries back.

An evocative passage from Ricoldo’s Epidtocae Commentatoriede Perditione Acconise (p. 62) is quoted which is revealing of the thought trends:

When I saw the Muslims most joyful and flourishing, the Christians really neglected and mentally dismayed...I began...to reflect upon the judgments of God...about Muslims and Christians...Peacefully and without opposition [the Muslims] at any rate, possess the most choice and fertile kingdoms and those that
are full of earthly delights ... fountains of oil, manna of heaven, rivers of paradise, aromatic spices, precious stones and the sweetest of fruits.

God seemed to have become the God of the Koran rather than the God of the Bible. And the cry was that the Christianity was in danger. Hence the Christendom called for its own martyrs. That is when nothing had been gained, as well as when all seemed lost, there was always the joy of martyrdom under the Muslim sword (p. 63).

Striking is the similarity of the grievances of the Muslims when the age of Christian victories came. Ricoldo’s above quoted sentences are not much different from the lament of Iqbal (d. 1357/1938) in his Shikwah, a few centuries later, when the tide of history had turned against them.

The book is a good addition to the stream of publications about the origins and roots, both political and ideological, of the Islamist movements worldwide. Primarily written for a Western audience, the work will contribute to explaining the concept of jihād, making clear not only what it means, but more importantly, what it does not mean or imply. The book has a wealth of knowledge. That, combined with Akbar’s lucid style make the book both illuminating and highly engaging.

Saad S. Khan


The crusades remain a very popular topic with scholars, students, the general public and, of course, politicians who are ready to apply the term crusade to any modern event that involves a confrontation between East and West. Hillenbrand’s book moves beyond the traditional scholarly view of the crusades and offers a refreshing and insightful look at the crusades from a different point of view, with the goal of providing a balanced approach to the topic (p. 3). As is to be expected, any balanced or general history is bound to leave issues, peoples or events out of the discourse. Hillenbrand confesses to doing this in regard to two important issues. It excludes the attitudes of Near Eastern Christians to the events of the crusades (p. 4). It does not discuss either
the crusades in Spain, which the author calls “a growth industry in modern scholarship” (p. 4).

These omissions, especially the latter one, are significant. Many of the issues in crusades historiography that Hillenbrand tries to correct with her book also plague the history of the Spanish crusades. As such, many useful parallels could have been drawn between the traditional and non-traditional geographical areas of crusades.

In the prologue Hillenbrand targets the nature of the sources she used to write the book. It is obvious that she knows the sources very well. She begins by calling the reader’s attention to the fundamental problem that crusade is a western concept, alien to Islamic history. Thus, she explains that there are no Islamic sources on just the crusades. This forces historians to use “works with quite other emphases and historiographical aims” (p. 9). Historians have to piece together the puzzle of what the attacks of the “Franks” represented to the Islamic world out of “dynastic histories of the Islamic world and the chronicles of cities” (p. 9). To further complicate the problem, Hillenbrand explains that many Islamic chronicles that could provide indirect but useful information about the period of the crusades are yet to be translated from Arabic. She deplores the lack of interest of Arabists in translating these sources. In fact, Hillenbrand believes that if Medievalists, specifically scholars who study medieval Europe, who usually do not read Arabic would be able to use these sources in translation, they would develop a more balanced view of the crusades.

In the meantime, Hillenbrand develops the most productive methodology to date to correct the serious limitations that these sources present. She combines her overwhelming knowledge of the printed sources for the time period with an equally impressive array of visual materials: coins and art objects. She also makes extensive use of literary sources. She uses successfully a multidisciplinary approach to weave as complete a picture as possible of the meaning of the crusades to the Muslim world. One good example of this is her discussion of how the jihād movement against the crusaders developed.

The multidisciplinary approach and especially the abundant use of visuals make the book an excellent teaching tool. Readers, especially those not familiar with Islamic history and culture, will be able to relate better to the Islamic world through these images. The only problem is that on many occasions, the images should be better integrated with the text on the page. The extensive end notes provided at the end of each chapter of the book are very useful because they point the reader to a wealth of sources and to potential future research topics. As with the rest of the book, the end notes are a clear indication of Hillenbrand’s mastery of the subject.
The book is divided into 9 chapters. In the prologue Hillenbrand states that the book is not arranged in chronological order, but it uses a thematic approach. The first topic she discusses is the first crusade and the initial reaction of the Muslims to the Christian attack. This chapter is essential to the layout of the book. It begins with a solid examination of the few Arabic sources available for the study of the first crusade. Hillenbrand notes that the authors of these sources were not military strategists, but religious scholars who explained the Christian attack as part of a divinely inspired history. The chapter then moves into a discussion of the schism between the Sunnī Seljuks and the Shiʿī Fatimids and how the split within Islam in the region clearly worked to the advantage of the crusaders. The lack of strong leadership and unity among the Muslims are for Hillenbrand the determining factors in the success of the first crusade. The initial Muslim response to the first crusade was determined by pragmatic local interests. Thus, the Fatimids cooperated with the crusaders, the Muslims in Syria signed agreements with the crusaders, and the Assassins were used by both Muslims and Christians (pp. 46, 82 and 76). Her extensive analysis of the historical context on the Islamic side should be combined with a similar analysis of the historical context on the Christian side.

The next two chapters in the book discuss the concept of jihād and its evolution in the context of the crusades. This is one of the most beneficial parts of Hillenbrand’s study. She begins with an extensive explanation of jihād, which is bound to destroy the stereotypical views that most readers hold on the subject. Then, the author explains that to comprehend the initial Muslim response to the crusades it is necessary to understand that before the crusades started, jihād feelings in Syria-Palestine were high among the religious classes, but not among the political and military leaders. Thus, until the two sides — religious and military — joined forces against the crusaders, the Christians had the upper-hand. When did this happen? In a masterful way, Hillenbrand explains that the ruler Nūr al-Dīn Zangī (d. 569/1174), the conqueror of Edessa, represents the first union between military and ideological aspects of jihād (p. 116). This trend was mastered by Nūr al-Dīn, who became the Islamic prototype of the jihād fighter (p. 118). This contrasts with the western conventional wisdom that such honour fell to Salādīn [Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn] (d. 589/1193). Hillenbrand concludes these two chapters by explaining that the rebirth of jihād greatly influenced the failure of the crusades. By “1187 the Muslims had acquired an ideological edge over the Franks” (p. 191).

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss cross-cultural exchange and perceptions of the other. Hillenbrand concludes that the Muslims had greater curiosity for the Franks than it has been traditionally assumed (p. 257). Hillenbrand states that
historians should not interpret literally the stereotypical Muslim views of Franks that Usâmah exhibited in his memoirs; that is, Usâmah made use of these stereotypes because he knew that this was what his audience expected to hear (p. 274). This section, however, offers little additional new information about Muslim perceptions of the crusaders. As Hillenbrand points out, this is due in part to the fact that it is very difficult to find information on the subject because most Muslim writers lived outside of the crusaders states and did not have direct exposure to the crusaders (p. 358).

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the military aspects of the crusades. Once again, Hillenbrand calls attention to the fact that western scholarship on the military component of the crusades has been very narrow in focus and mainly limited to the study of crusader castles in Syria-Palestine. She urges historians to broaden their study of military techniques and strategies beyond the construction and use of crusader castles (p. 432).

In conclusion, Hillenbrand’s book represents a major step forward for the field of crusades history. It points in the right direction. In fact, its rich content can be dissected into countless other books on such topics as jihad, etc. One can only hope that Arabists and Medievalists are paying attention and that a new more balanced view of the crusades will develop by combining the Christian and the Islamic views of the crusades, events that continue to capture our imagination.

Isabel A. O’Connor


Television screens have recently shown Iraqi civilians, in the chaos brought on by the fall of Şâddâm Hûsûn’s regime, trying to maintain order on street corners or in front of public buildings. Reporters tell us that these individuals have been “sent by the local mosque”. Whatever form a future Iraq will take, it seems that the traditional religious class, or ‘ulama’, will have a role to play in the reconstruction of Iraq. It is this class and their history from the 19th century to the present, that is the subject of Muhammad Qasim Zaman’s
study. More precisely, his focus is on the ‘ulamā’ of South Asia and in particular the Deobandis. His book is an exploration of the ‘ulamā’, their understanding of Islamic tradition, their role as interpreters of Islamic law, their impact on and involvement in “political Islam”, and their role in sectarian conflicts in the Subcontinent. The study also takes stock of the impact this participation has had on the ‘ulamā’ themselves. No effort is made to describe the normative function of an ‘ālim, or to inventory his various roles in Islamic society.

The ‘introduction’ includes a discussion of the wider sense of “tradition”, that religious entity which the ‘ulamā’ preserve, interpret and speak for. Here we meet Alasdair MacInyre’s theory that a tradition can only be understood from within; that is, each tradition has an internal logic and language, which must be mastered before it can be properly understood (pp. 4–5). Zaman raises this concern in light of both our (the non-‘ulamā’s) approach to tradition, and that of modernist Muslims who relate to their tradition without a “traditional” education (p. 7). Here Zaman has raised a significant point, although he is not about to fully resolve it. This discussion falls within the field of Hermeneutics, a vast area of inquiry which is outside the purview of this book. Zaman also introduces us to Talal Asad’s view of a “discursive” Islamic tradition, one that relates not only to the past, but to the present and the future as well (p. 6). In light of these discussions Zaman presents his own concern with the ‘ulamā’, stating “… their larger claim on our attention lies in the ways in which they have mobilized this tradition to define issues of religious identity and authority in the public sphere and to articulate changing roles for themselves in contemporary Muslim politics” (p. 10).

The first chapter deals with the ‘ulamā’ discourse on Islamic law under British rule. Here a struggle is documented between the ‘ulamā’ and the colonial authorities over the right to interpret the shari‘ah. The ‘ulamā’ were mobilized to assert their authority in this realm. They worked to keep the British from codifying Islamic law and thus appropriating its interpretation. This authority to interpret not only guaranteed the ‘ulamā’ authority, but it also allowed them the flexibility to respond in the future to new social and political situations (p. 37). The second chapter takes up the vast body of commentary literature, in which the ‘ulamā’ specialize. Zaman rightfully notes that this literature, when produced in the modern period, has largely been viewed as sterile by researchers. He explores these writings, most of which are legal commentaries, and underlines their function in reinforcing the ties between ‘ulamā’, and their modern service as vehicles for adapting to new political and legal realities.
The third chapter looks at the authority of the ‘ulamā’ through the institutional lens of the madrasahs. The focus here is the various efforts at reform — particularly important for modern Islam — which the governing authorities have attempted to implement. Significantly, in this context a new conception of religion emerges, one which sees religion as representing a distinct social sphere (p. 62). The struggle with colonialism and sectarian realities forced this realization upon the ‘ulamā’ of Pakistan and India earlier than it has on the ‘ulamā’ in other Muslim communities. The idea is that the religious sphere has been demarcated by the ‘ulamā’ themselves as part of their strategy to preserve their authority. Flowing nicely from this discussion is chapter four’s Conceptions of the Islamic State, which explores the ‘ulamā’ s understanding of their own role from the perspective of political Islam. Here Islamic law is central, but debates over its implementation have dramatically divided the ‘ulamā’. Of particular significance is the issue of codification, as against ijtihād. The codification approach to the implementation of Islamic law would be easier to sell to the ruling powers (and the Modernists), but with the loss of ijtihād the authority of the ‘ulamā’ and flexibility in the face of changing political and social circumstances would be undermined (p. 96).

The fifth chapter examines the radicalisation of Sunnī and Shi‘ah identities in Pakistan, and the various roles the ‘ulamā’ have played on both sides. Zaman observes a structural similarity between the two communities, particularly in the creation of distinct militant bodies (the Sipahi Muḥammad and the Sipahi Shāhībah) which allegedly carry out the work of sectarian violence, at arm’s length from the establishment ‘ulamā’, who implicitly support their efforts. Zaman points out that the ‘ulamā’, in particular the Sunnī Deobandis, have seen their influence extended into new areas through the mobilization of sectarianism. Note is also made of the retreat of mysticism, on both sides (Barīlawīs and Shaykhīs), in the face of these sectarian mobilizations. The modern devotionalism of the Sunnī radicals, an attempt to counteract “cultural Shi‘ism”, is also acknowledged.

Chapter six is a comparative look at the modern religiopolitical activism of the ‘ulamā’, and how it relates to Islamism. Zaman notes the differences between al-Azhar’s experience of government reform and control, and that of the relatively decentralized madrasah system of Pakistan and Northern India which has largely escaped government impositions. In contrast, the Saudi Arabian ‘ulamā’ have an assured authority based on state ideology, and their control over the interpretation and implementation of the shari‘ah goes unchallenged by the ruling powers. The Egyptian ‘ulamā’ are most active politically through their non-institutional “peripheral” positions. Saudi “peripheral” ‘ulamā’ also overlap with Islamism, although the authority of the
‘ulamā’ seems to be increasing at the expense of the Saudi rulers. In Pakistan the ‘ulamā’ have found common cause with Islamists over such issues as Indian Kashmir and the Soviet and U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Zaman notes within these three examples a common development. An advantageous ground is staked out by the ‘ulamā’, since “…the ruling elite have sometimes enhanced the scope of the ‘ulamā’s authority as a counterweight to the Islamist challenge to their regimes. But this has enabled the ‘ulamā’ not only to challenge the Islamists on behalf of the state, but also to challenge the state itself on behalf of Islam” (p. 172). As a result, the ‘ulamā’ benefit greatly from being able to play both sides — switching association as they need to in their struggle with the state or with the Islamists for authority.

With this book Muhammad Qasim Zaman has placed the modern ‘ulamā’ squarely into the debates over the rise and appeal of Islamist movements. His analysis, stressing the flexibility and dynamism of the ‘ulamā’, has made them now part of the power equation which often has simply opposed Islamism to secular governing bodies. The book presents a well-documented exploration of the ‘ulamā’ in the Subcontinent, and an important comparison of the modern ‘ulamā’ of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and India.

Richard McGregor


Of the various accounts of the Islamic movement in contemporary Egypt, this is the most riveting, insightful, up-to-date, and self-critical. There are numerous writings on the Islamist movement; however, few offer an insider’s perspective on contemporary Islamism, its trials and tribulations and the challenges it has faced since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. In this important work, Egyptian Islamist lawyer Muntaṣir al-Zayyāt critically discusses the life, thought, and activities of the founder of the Egyptian Jiḥād movement, Dr Ayman al-Zawāhirī, second-in-command of the Qi‘ā’idah, who has been accused by the United States of being the brains behind the attacks on the United States. The book offers a detailed analysis of
Zawahiri’s social and educational background, religious philosophy, and involvement with activist Islamist concerns in Egypt before his permanent departure to Afghanistan in 1987.

This book is a welcome addition to the meagre literature in Western languages on the role of the Islamist movements in contemporary politics, their social and economic origins, political and religious philosophies, and the impact they have presumably had on world politics, such as the events surrounding the tragic attacks on the United States in 2001. An important thesis of this work is that the decision by the Qā’idah leadership in Afghanistan to attack the United States has created a serious backlash with far-reaching consequences for the entire world. Undoubtedly, one must understand these ramifications in the post-Cold War context: the military and economic supremacy of the United States in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse in the early 1990s, the recent decision of the United States to invade Iraq and topple the Ba’thist regime, as well as many other related factors. A second thesis of the author is that only a minority of modern Islamist movements has promoted violence against the state in the Muslim world, and that political repression by the governments of the Arab and Muslim worlds have been solely responsible for the creation of such radical movements. Furthermore, the attacks on the United States have given the political elite in the Muslim world more leverage than before to increase their repression of the Islamist movement, and indeed any oppositional voice that dares to call for democracy in these countries. A healthy democratic process is unlikely to take hold in the contemporary Muslim world because of the declared aim of the United States to wage an unlimited battle against terrorism and because of the support the United States has lent in the past to most of the dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world.

At the outset, it is quite important to underline the fact that Islamism in the modern Arab and Muslim worlds has never been a monolithic phenomenon. There are three types of Islamism in the modern Muslim world: (1) pre-colonial; (2) colonial; and (3) post-colonial. Wahhabism falls into the first category, whereas the Ikhwan of Egypt (The Muslim Brotherhood Movement) falls into the second, and the Jihād and al-Jamā‘ah al-Islāmiyyah movements fall into the third. By and large, modern Islamism has been the product of modern conditions in the Muslim world, such as the spread of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the rise of the nation-state, and the failure of its modernization programmes.

Zayyāt’s book falls into the genre of religious and political self-criticism. In this sense, it sheds much light on the Islamic movement in the last three decades of the twentieth century. This genre of Islamist writing is somewhat
rare; it has captured the imagination of many Islamist leaders since Sayyid Quṭb’s execution by the Egyptian government in 1966. The strength of the book stems from the fact that its author is one of the most significant members of al-Jamāʿah al-Islāmiyyah, an Islamist organization that at one time advocated violence against the state in Egypt.

Many major developments have taken place in Egypt and the Arab world since Quṭb’s execution: the imprisonment or exile of thousands of members of the Ikhwān; the 1967 Arab defeat in the war with Israel and the failure of Nasserism to build a new Arab society based on socialism, nationalism, and unity; the death of Nasser in 1970; the accession of Sadat to power in the same year, and the subsequent de-Nasserization of Egypt in the 1970s and 1980s. These major events, combined with the failure of the state to modernize Egyptian society in the wake of launching its Open-Door Policy in the early 1970s, created deep social, economic and ideological fissures within Egyptian society, which translated into the rise of several Islamist movements that were inspired by Quṭb’s confrontational ideology, especially as it developed in his later years in prison before his execution. Zayyāt correctly notes that Quṭb, especially in his prison phase, had influenced Ṣawāhirī’s thought tremendously and in fact the latter considered Quṭb a saint and martyr of the Islamist movement. Quṭb’s *magnum opus*, *Fi Ṣīlāl al-Qurʾān* is a document of great importance. According to Zayyāt, the Egyptian regime thought that with Quṭb’s execution, the Islamist movement was dead: little did they realize at the time that the jihād movement would be born from the womb of Quṭbian ideology, and that his execution and radical thought would determine the ideological and religious philosophy of the movement for several decades to come.

Egypt knew a plethora of radical Islamist movements in the 1970s, but none attracted more attention than the al-Jamāʿah al-Islāmiyyah and the Jihād movements, which were established in the Egyptian prisons in the 1960s and 1970s. These two movements forged a major alliance that remained more or less intact until 1987. Sadat’s assassination in 1981 put these movements in very difficult positions, since literally thousands of their members were jailed or escaped to countries outside of Egypt.

Zayyāt highlights Ṣawāhirī’s social class and educational background. Ṣawāhirī hails from an aristocratic Egyptian family; his grandfather on his mother’s side is the late Ḥabīb al-Rahmān ‘Azzām Pasha (d. 1954), the founder of the Arab League and a major player in Arab and Muslim politics before 1952. Is there a connection between social class and violent Islamism? Zayyāt seems to think that Islamic faith/ideology exerts immense influence on all sorts of people because of the doctrinal message of Islam. In addition to
highlighting Zawâhirî’s social and educational background, Zayyât persuasively argues that the 1967 Arab defeat with Israel had a tremendous influence on young Zawâhirî’s thought, as well as that of other Islamists in the 1960s and 1970s.

Sadat’s assassination in 1981 signalled a major and dangerous shift in the relationship between the state and radical Islamist movements. Upon assuming power, Sadat was tolerant of these movements because of his insistence on eradicating the power of the left and nationalism in the country, but the state was having a hard time repressing these movements by the end of the 1970s. The state hoped that these movements would phase out due to the severe repression they faced after Sadat’s assassination. Zayyât correctly notes that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 gave a major boost to the Jihâd and other radical movements. Zawâhirî and thousands of others belonging to radical movements throughout the Muslim world went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets with an eye toward training a strong cadre of Islamist militants who, upon returning to their countries, would topple the existing regimes. Zayyât vehemently disagrees with those who argue that Zawâhirî was exiled to Afghanistan by order of the Egyptian government. Zawâhirî went to Afghanistan for the purpose of implementing his ideas of jihâd in a new environment and away from the watchful eyes of the Egyptian secret police. According to Zayyât: “Afganistan formed the necessary bases for the settlement of Zawâhirî and his followers since its environment of jihâd and fighting suited very well their desires and objectives” (pp. 165).

What is significant about Zayyât’s analysis of the Jihâd movement, the Qa’îdah, and the attacks on the United States is that he does not doubt for a second that the Qa’îdah was behind the attacks on the United States. There is a common suspicion in the Arab and Muslims worlds that the September attacks were not the work of the Qa’îdah or any Islamic group but rather were perpetrated by the CIA or Israel. Zayyât does not seem to buy this argument. He is convinced beyond any shadow of doubt that Zawâhirî was the brains behind this attack. In order to prove his point, Zayyât marshals a great deal of evidence to demonstrate Zawâhirî’s infatuation with “revolutionary or coup d’état conditions”, which are predicated on the use of violence to achieve political objectives.

Zayyât traces Zawâhirî’s violent approach to politics to the 1980s. In fact, his philosophy of violence had matured long before he went to Afghanistan. Meeting Bin Laden in Afghanistan enabled Zawâhirî to recreate his Jihâd movement when the two became close friends and strong allies. Zayyât notes that Bin Laden influenced Zawâhirî as much as Zawâhirî influenced Bin Laden. Though Zawâhirî does not possess Bin Laden’s orational or preaching
skills, neither does Bin Laden possess Zawāhiri’s ideological acumen and skill in planning. Both were in agreement over the use of violence against the foreign and domestic enemies of Islam. Both, who come from aristocratic backgrounds, shared a common goal: fighting the enemies of Islam. To Bin Laden, American presence in the Gulf was an anathema, and U.S. support for Zionism and Israel was unforgivable. These factors galvanized the ‘Arab street’ behind Bin Laden. Zawāhiri influenced Bin Laden in the sense that he was able to sell Bin Laden his ‘revolutionary jihād ideology,’ which changed Bin Laden from a salafī preacher doing charity work to a jihādī fighter immersed in finding legal rulings to fight against the Americans and Zionists. Furthermore, Zawāhiri surrounded Bin Laden with some of the most important leaders of the Jihād movement, all of whom highly respected Zawāhiri’s personality.

The rise of the Taliban movement to power in the early 1990s and its control of most of Afghanistan by 1996 gave an immense political and military boost to Zawāhiri’s Jihād movement. The Taliban movement came to power on the heels of the failure of the different parties to unite Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. Zayyāt does not tell us much about the reasons behind the rise of the Taliban or why Pakistan provided such enormous assistance to Taliban. However, he notes that Zawāhiri became infatuated with the Taliban philosophy and way of life to the extent that he supported their ban on women’s activities outside their homes. In this sense, Zawāhiri was more concerned about implementing his revolutionary ideology, controlling power, than in protecting human rights.

The following were probably the reasons for the alliance between the Taliban, on the one hand, and Bin Laden and Zawāhiri, on the other: (1) The Taliban conservative ideology; (2) Bin Laden’s financial aid to them; and (3) their role in jihād against the Soviets. The Taliban heavily relied on the Qāʿidah organization in their dealings with the external world, and it is highly doubtful that they understood the position of Afghanistan in the world political scene after the Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent fall of the Soviet system. In addition to providing a safe haven to members of the Egyptian Jihād movement, the Taliban opened Afghanistan’s doors to members of other Islamist organizations (militant or not), such as those of the Jamā’ah al-Islāmiyyah, who could not return to their original countries for fear of being persecuted by their governments; however, Zayyāt adds that Jihād members enjoyed privileged positions under the Taliban, and were the envy of other organizations.

Because of this privileged position, the Jihād organization began to act as a state within a state in Afghanistan to the extent that Zawāhiri planned to assassinate a number of prominent Egyptian political and military leaders,
such as the Minister of the Interior and others. In the 1990s, Egypt was rocked by assassination attempts, made possible by the unlimited amount of money Bin Laden had placed at Zawāhīrī’s disposal. By targeting prominent Egyptian leaders, Zawāhīrī did not differentiate between domestic and foreign enemies; on the contrary, his priority at this stage (around the mid 1990s) was to wage jihād against those he considered domestic enemies by raising the motto that the way to Jerusalem passes through Cairo, Tunisia, and Algiers. Zayy āt, therefore, registers his astonishment when in 1996 Zawāhīrī placed his signature behind the establishment of the “International Islamic Front to Wage Jihād Against Jews and Crusaders”. Undoubtedly, this change in tactic was forced on Zawāhīrī after his organization failed to achieve its goals of violent change in Egypt and after the arrest of many of its members in Egypt and overseas.

What is interesting in the last section of the book is Zayy āt’s discussion of Zawāhīrī’s criticism of the mainstream Ikhwān, as well as his critique of Zayyāt himself because of the latter’s role in advocating peaceful instead of violent means to stop the bloodshed in Egyptian society. Zawāhīrī accused Zayyāt of treason to Islam and of being a stooge to the Americans and Israelis. What many ultimately find troublesome about Zawāhīrī is his propensity for chaotic stands, his use of violence and accusation. According to Zayy āt, Zawāhīrī’s haphazard attitude resulted in his joining of the International Front and accounts for his violent bent of mind. In establishing the Front, Zawāhīrī actually included the Jamā‘ah al-Islāmiyyah without consulting its leaders.

Under the heading “Islamists have paid for the mistakes of Zawāhīrī”, Zayyāt sheds important light on the events that surround 9/11 and the position of the Islamist movement ever since. He is convinced that the violent attacks on the United States were, first and foremost, the product of an angry, violent, and vengeful mentality that cared less about the consequences of such an attack and more about the immediate damage these attacks would produce and their political ramifications. Because of this carelessness, Zawāhīrī has placed all Islamic movements, including the mainstream, in grave danger both at home and abroad. Zayy āt does not disagree with either Bin Laden and Zawāhīrī that both America and Israel are the main enemies of the Arab and Muslim peoples; however, he does not think that violence can achieve political objectives. The violent attacks on the world’s only superpower gave the United States and its allies in the Arab and Muslim worlds the golden opportunity to attack and eradicate all Islamist movements. Those Islamists who were not members of the Jihād movement and who had sought refuge in Afghanistan because of political oppression in their home countries found themselves face-to-face with America’s huge anger and power. They found
themselves in a battle that was not of their making and suffered death or imprisonment as a result.

Zayyāt places his fingers on a major problem in the contemporary Arab and Muslim worlds: How to deal with Islamist movements? As a lawyer, Zayyāt does not believe that repression is the solution, and that the 9/11 tragedy has given an upper hand to dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world to perpetrate more oppression against Islamist movements and other oppositional political and religious forces. I believe that one has to embark on a careful examination of the roots of violence in contemporary Arab and Muslim societies. However, Zayyāt does not dwell much on this point. Clearly, the Arab and Muslim worlds have been plagued by tremendous social, economic, and political difficulties that produced violent movements like the Jihād and the Jamā‘ah Islāmiyyah. The increasing authoritarianism of the political elite and the increasing gaps between the haves and have-nots in the Arab world are not likely to mitigate the problem of violence but will instead permit it to fester. Finally, the unlimited war on terror declared by the Bush administration is not helpful in dealing with the problems either. The American occupation of Iraq is certainly going to enhance the position of extremist Islamist movements in the Muslim world.

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’


Jeremy Seabrook’s most recent book, *Freedom Unfinished*, deals with development in Bangladesh and in it he contends that the victory of the liberation war was never fully realized. Following the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, a military dictatorship was established that had the support of religious fundamentalists. This book is an exploration of the intersection of economic oppression, religious fundamentalism, and dysfunctional governance. Seabrook argues that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the primary means by which the poor resist the power structures of the rich and
religious fundamentalists. He contends that religion has become politicized and this politicization of religion is the primary cause of economic failure.

The format of Seabrook’s book is an interesting collection of interviews he conducted in 1999 and 2000 with intellectuals, artists, and a few religious leaders as he travelled throughout Bangladesh visiting groups and cultural centres organized by Proshika, one of Bangladesh’s first NGOs. It is filled with vivid descriptions of the landscape, the people, and their struggles and triumphs over poverty and oppression. The chapters are named for regions visited, beginning with Seabrook’s arrival in Dhaka. In this first chapter, he interviews Faruque Ahmed who describes Proshika’s early roots in the famine of 1974 and how Proshika became a viable means by which the poor could organize as the government became less and less effectual. Through their organization, the poor are enabled to challenge the existing power structures that cause their poverty.

The three NGOs mentioned in Seabrook’s *Freedom Unfinished* are BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Grameen Bank, and Proshika. BRAC and Grameen are two of the largest NGOs in Bangladesh today. Seabrook reports a conversation with Mahbubul Karim, the senior vice-president of Proshika, in which he describes BRAC as project-oriented, Grameen as target-oriented, and Proshika as process-oriented. Proshika lays emphasis on raising the consciousness of the poor through their organization, micro-credit programmes and an emphasis on the preservation of Bengali cultural art forms. One might question why there is an emphasis on culture. Seabrook clearly explains Proshika’s rationale for its cultural focus. Bangladesh was created on a platform of secularism, democracy, and the protection and preservation of Bengali identity. Since the assassination of Sheikh Mujib shortly after independence, Bengali culture has increasingly been the target of criticism by the religious right, which was also opposed to the Bangladeshi war for independence. These critics argue that Bengali culture is in conflict with Islamic culture, and that Islamic culture should take precedence over the culture of Bengal. This intensifying cultural battle is the site of power struggles between the privileged and the poor, and between the religious right (referred to as fundamentalists by Seabrook) and women.

The book offers insight into the power struggles in rural and urban Bangladesh. It demonstrates the ways in which the poor become landless, women become sex workers, and the intense opposition faced by the poor in their efforts to transform their lives. Through the many interviews Seabrook conducts with Bangladeshis, he effectively illuminates the manner in which women have been made central pawns in this struggle between the religious right and the poor. The religious right wants to impose a strict form of
With a narrow reading of *shari’ab* by fundamentalist leaders, women would have reduced access to jobs, jobs they desperately need. As Seabrook reveals, endemic to life in Bangladesh is the journey many women make into predestined poverty, beginning with early marriage, divorce and abandonment, left alone to face the daily effort to feed and care for their children.

A significant contribution of this work is Seabrook’s ability to shed light on the imbrication of crime, politics and religion. The religious right publicly expresses their ideological platform through their participation in political parties such as Jamā’at-i Islāmi, who they align themselves with the BNP (Bangladesh National Party) in a struggle against the Awami league, which claims to represent secularism. In 1991 the opposition parties, primarily the BNP and the Awami League, successfully ousted the military ruler Ershad by effective execution of *ha tāls* (general strikes) that paralyzed the young nation. Today, these political parties continue to use *ha tāls* against whichever party is in power in an absurd effort to demonstrate the governing party’s ineffectiveness. Instead of supporting the democratic process, they cause further economic devastation from the grass roots to the national level. All life in cities and rural areas comes to nearly a complete halt during these periods. Women cannot get to their jobs in garment factories, all land transport is halted, and all shops are closed by the threat of physical violence carried out by men roaming the streets enforcing the *ha tāls*. Since Bangladesh’s independence, the government has been the means by which the rich, who find comfort in aligning themselves with the fundamentalists, have protected their interests.

Seabrook intersperses interviews with his own short discussions of schooling, landlessness, religion, and women’s lives. At times he raises important questions. For example, in his discussion of Proshika schools in slum areas, Seabrook notes the level of student awareness of Bangabandhu, national poets such as Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore. He then raises the question: “But what does such ‘knowing’ mean, when their experience as been shaped by migration, landlessness, menial labour, subordination?” (p. 71). These are some of the more important areas that needed further analysis in order to bring readers to a better understanding of these provocative questions.

The only region not mentioned by Seabrook is the northeast region of Sylhet. It is disappointing that the story of Sylhet, where tea plantations dot the rolling hills and lush green landscape, was not told or even explored in the book. Had he done so he could have revealed the struggles of the men and
women, both Bengali and Adivasi, who spend their entire lives in these tea gardens. Additionally, it would have been a great opportunity to discuss the impact of out-migration on Bengali-Muslim culture due to the high number of Sylhetis who migrate to the Middle East in search of work. Such a discussion would yield further information on the nature of fundamentalist resources, where it finds support and how it spreads its influence in Bangladesh. As workers return from the Middle East, they bring back with them Middle Eastern and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam coupled with new economic power that serves to support a fundamentalist agenda at home.

Moreover, the plight of women in Bangladesh could have been made more palpable if Seabrook included startling statistics of the number of female-headed households, acid-burn victims, female suicide, and the rising number of sex workers.

The book ends with a discussion of two major holidays in Bangladesh, Ekushey February and Eid al-Adha (‘Id al-Adha). The former celebrates Bengali language and remembers those killed during the language struggle, and the other, is an Islamic holiday that commemorates Abraham’s total submission to God as demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Does the juxtaposition of these two holidays represent two separate cultures? Although readers are provided with a solid depiction of the war of cultures between the secular humanists and the religious right, it is not clear as to why Seabrook leaves out a discussion of the moderate, tolerant Islam as reflected in the lives of the secularists, in the religious piety, and the veneration associated with Sufi saints or Bauls of Bengal. One is left with, what I would argue, is a mistaken perception that this tolerant Islam is only a part of Bangladesh’s past.

These reservations, however, should not overshadow the important overall contribution this book makes to a general understanding of religion and power dynamics in Bangladesh’s economic development. The book’s interdisciplinary approach will appeal to those interested in South Asian politics, religion and economic development. Seabrook successfully demonstrates that it is the NGOs who have become the locus of hope and change for the poor and marginalized in Bangladesh — women, children, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Adivasis. He paints a picture of a country not simply impoverished by corruption, crime, and natural disasters, but one that is fertile, and rich in culture and history. Seabrook demonstrates that Bangladesh is, despite some of the most devastating conditions of poverty in the world, a wellspring of intellectuals, artists, and people passionate about ushering in a change to improve their society. This book illuminates the
incredible human spirit that drives the disempowered to overcome the obstacles that are ever present in Bangladeshi society.

Sufia Mendez Uddin


The book under review is in fact a statement of protest against the attitude of those contemporary Muslim scholars who assume an authoritarian posture while expressing their opinions on issues relating to the *shariʿah*. The point of protest is that they virtually equate their opinions with the dictates of God and try to impose them on others.

The author was spurred to pursue his scholarly investigation by an incident which resulted to the publication of this book: “. . . in 1996, [when] a Muslim basketball player refused to stand up for the American national anthem” (p. 1) giving rise to a public controversy in America. However, according to the author, “the book is rooted in a much longer and more complicated dynamic” (p. 2).

The book takes up for discussion, among other things, the legal edict (*fatwā*) issued by the Society for Adherence to the Sunnah, which contended that standing for national anthem represents an act of *walaʿ* (allegiance) and a Muslim is not allowed to show his *walaʿ* to unbelievers and their objects of worship (p. 158). The author considers this illustrative of the authoritarian trend in Islamic legal discourse. The author is also dissatisfied with the arbitrary manner in which at times *ahādīth* are marshalled by this group of scholars. This trend, the author believes, negates the richness and diversity of the Islamic tradition. He argues that in order to uphold the authoritativeness of the religious text, and to respect the integrity of Divine law, it is necessary to adopt rigorous analytical methodologies of interpretation.

The author stresses that no human being embodies God’s Divine authority. Human mind is free to strive to discover the Divine will, but no one has the right to lay an exclusive claim to knowing it. If a person, while
interpreting a text, assumes that it has “a clear, precise and singular meaning” (p. 41) excluding all evidence to the contrary and disregards all other possible competing views, he in fact hijacks and nullifies the text by violating the text’s independence and integrity.

This authoritarianism, in the opinion of the author, represents a deviation from the classical juristic tradition of Islam which is characterized by disagreement and diversity of opinions and which was a major contributing factor in the diversity that has characterised the Islamic legal schools. Ironically, the author’s own attitude seems no less authoritarian than the attitude of those whom he seeks to demolish through his work. On many of the issues that he has taken up for discussion, he seems absolutely sure that the text lends itself only to a clear, precise and singular meaning.

The author also criticizes what he terms “Wahhābi puritanism” which tends to promote, according to the author, a bifurcated morality in the Muslim society. One of the manifestations of this bifurcated morality mentioned by the author is that while a Muslim male could work alongside and even talk to non-Muslim women during the day, the same person would insist that the voice of women should not be heard in an Islamic center (centre), or that women should sit behind a curtain when attending the functions of such centers (p. 14).

The author believes that the Wahhābi thought does not care for natural rights, and for such notions as human dignity, common sense, decency and reasonableness. It only insists on the law even when it is inherently immoral (p. 16). If something is proved to be a law, then it will be presumed to be correct and reasonable. He offers an illustration: if a husband asks his wife to make herself available for his sexual enjoyment, she must consent unless she is physically ill. Therefore, according to the Wahhābi approach, this position “is moral, beautiful, reasonable and sensible by virtue of the fact that the law mandates it” (p. 16).

The author is particularly annoyed that recourse is made to aḥādīth to support such positions. He mentions several instances of recourse to the aḥādīth which, in the opinion of the author, are characterised by a degrading attitude to women. He examines a number of aḥādīth relating to the status of women, and concludes that those aḥādīth suffer from serious defects in their substance and hence could not be relied upon for deriving laws therefrom.

It is pertinent to point out that most of the aḥādīth to which the author has objected have been regarded as sound and authentic by the Hadīth experts on the grounds that they have been transmitted through sound chains of narration. Yet their validity and legitimacy have been questioned by the
author, who argues that they have serious moral and social implications for women.

In our view, the *ahadith* under study do not pose any mentionable problem for women. The meanings implied in these *ahadith* are obviously metaphorical rather than literal. They only imply that a woman should adopt an attitude of due respect towards her husband. It is also to be noted here that contrary to the author’s contention the notion of respect to the husband as articulated in the traditions under study, does not imply servitude or subordination of a woman to her husband. They only allude to an attitude of reverence towards the husband as the maintainer and protector (*qawwām*) of the family. This notion of respect is in no way in conflict with the legal rights that a woman enjoys as a partner in matrimonial life. On that score, a woman is essentially at par with a man. The principle of equity and equality in rights and duties of spouses has been emphasized in the Qur’an itself: “… And due to them (wives) is similar to what is expected of them according to what is equitable” (Qur’an 2: 228).

The ideal marital relationship as envisaged by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him) is also the one based on a view of humanity that is characterized by mutual respect, equality and dignity rather than servitude and subordination. The *ahadith* under discussion are not inconsistent with the ideals and values of love, affection, compassion, mercy and companionship which Islam seeks to promote through marriage. The Prophet (peace be on him) was himself kind and gentle to his wives and directed the believers as well to treat their wives with kindness and sensitivity.

As regards the author’s posture in subjecting *ahadith* to critical scrutiny, we share the author’s opinion that in judging the authenticity of a *ḥadith*, one should not confine oneself simply to examining its chain of narration; instead, one should also consider its substance (*matn*). However, as far as the *ahadith* under consideration are concerned, examined on the touchstone of the Islamic value system, and the foundational principles enshrined in the Qur’anic conception of marital relationship, which requires that a wife should indeed be respectful and obedient to her husband (see Qur’an 4: 34).

While going through the work under review, the reader encounters an interesting fact, that the book which started with a criticism of a *fatwā* on standing up for national anthem, soon changes into a manifesto of the rights of women. A considerable part of the book is devoted to issues relating to women such as *hijab* (veiling), segregation between men and women, respect for husband, the extent of the husband’s right to have sexual relationship with
his wife, etc. In an effort to restore the woman’s dignity and save her from becoming a “punching bag of men” (p. 17), the author challenges many authentic *ahādīth* and rejects a number of positions taken by the Muslim jurists. Even the issues which are a matter of consensus in Islamic Law, being established by the Qur’ānic text (such as lower share for women in inheritance, etc.), the author argues for their re-interpretation in the light of “Islamic moral imperatives and normative values” (p. 148).

The most important observation about the book is that in his polemical condemnation of Wahhabism, the author focuses on a number of issues that are not specific to Wahhābīs. The question of *hijāb* is a case in point. Far from being controversial among the jurists of Islam, it has been the established view among them that *hijāb* had been prescribed by the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*. Moreover, the consensus on *hijāb* is not based on analogical reasoning; rather it is anchored in explicit injunctions of the Qur’ān and is reinforced by the authentic *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him).

Over all, the book is informative, educative and interesting. The author has investigated the issue of authoritarianism in the Islamic legal discourse with great vigour. One may disagree with some of his conclusions, but one cannot deny the academic worth of the book and the pains that the author took in tackling some of the sensitive and thorny issues which confront modern Islamic jurisprudence, in fact, modern Islamic thought.

Muhammad Tahir Mansoori

* * *
Islam after the Enlightenment: Some Reflections on a Polemic

T. J. WINTER

Bismi’llāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, may I express my warm gratitude to you all for paying me the compliment of attending today? It is particularly gratifying to me to attend an event in this country, the only state established in recent history specifically as a homeland for Muslims. It is also a privilege to be associated with the name of the late and revered Altaf Gauhar, whose translations from the Qurʾān certainly formed, back in the late 1970s, part of my own personal journey towards Islam.

I want to talk about religion — our religion — and address the question of what exactly is going on when we speak about the prospects of a mutually helpful engagement between Islam and Western modernity. I propose to tackle this rather large question by invoking what I take to be the underlying issue in all religious talk, which is its ability both to propose and to resolve paradoxes.

We might begin by saying that theology is the most ambitious and fruitful of disciplines because it is all about the successful squaring of circles. Most obviously, it seeks to capture, in the limited net of human language, something of the mystery of an infinite God. Most taxingly, it seeks to demonstrate that an omnipotent God is also absolutely just, and that an apparently infinite reward or chastisement can attend upon finite human behaviour. Most scandalously, it holds that we are more than natural philosophy can describe or know, and that we can achieve states of being in what we call the soul that are as movingly palpable as they are inexplicable. The Spirit, as the scriptures tell us, “is of the command of our Lord, and of knowledge you have been given but little” (Qurʾān 17: 85).

So we have a list of imponderables. But to this list the specifically Islamic form of monotheism adds several additional items. The first of these items is

* This is the text of the First Annual Altaf Gauhar Memorial Lecture which was delivered by the author in Islamabad on December 23, 2002.
what we call universalism, that is to say, that Islam, despite the particularity of its origins, does not limit itself to the upliftment of any given section of humanity, but rather announces a desire to transform the entire human family. This is, if you like, its Ishmaelite uniqueness: the religions that spring from Isaac (peace be on him) are, in our understanding, an extension of Hebrew and Occidental particularity, while Islam is to be universal. Hagar, unlike Sarah, is half-Egyptian, half-Gentile, and it is she who goes forth into the Gentile world. Rembrandt’s famous picture of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael has Sarah mockingly peering out of a window. She is old, and stays at home; while Hagar is young, and looks, with her son, towards limitless horizons.¹

In the hadith, we learn that “Every prophet was sent to his own people; but I am sent to all mankind” (bu’īthtu ilā’l-nās kāffah).² This will demand the squaring of a circle — in fact of many circles — in a way that is characteristically Islamic. Despite its Arabian origins, Islam is to be not merely for the nations, but of the nations. No pre-modern civilisation embraced more cultures than that of Islam — in fact, it was Muslims who invented globalisation. The many-coloured fabric of the traditional Ummah is not merely part of the glory of the Blessed Prophet (peace be on him), of whom it is said: “Truly your adversary is the one cut off” (Qur’ān 108: 3). It also demonstrates the divine purpose that this Ishmaelite covenant is to bring a monotheism that uplifts, rather than devastates cultures. Islam brought immense fertility to the Indian Subcontinent, upgrading architecture, cuisine, music, and languages. Nothing could be more unfair than the Indian chauvinistic thesis, given its most articulate and insidious voice by V.S. Naipaul, that Islam is a travelling parochialism, an “Arab imperialism”.³

That, then, has been another circle successfully squared — the bringing to the very different genius of the Subcontinent an uncompromising monotheism which fertilised, and brought to the region its highest artistic and literary moments. Mother India was never more fecund than when she welcomed the virility of Islam. Remember the words of ‘Allāma Muhammad Iqbal:

Behold and see! In Ind’s domain
Thou shalt not find the like again,

¹ See, Peter Van der Coelen, Patriarchs, Angels and Prophets: The Old Testament in Netherlandish Printmaking from Lucas Van Leyden to Rembrandt (Amsterdam: Museum Het Rembrandthuis, 1996), 77.
That, though a Brahman’s son I be,  
Tabriz and Rum stand wide to me.4

It is our confidence, moreover, that this triumphant demonstration of Islam’s universalism has not come to an end. Perhaps the greatest single issue exercising the world today is the following: the engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles, cannot manage?

As Muslims, of course, we believe that every culture, including the culture of modern consumer liberalism, stands accountable before the claims of revelation. There must, therefore, be a mode of behaviour that modernity can adopt that can be meaningfully termed Islamic, without entailing its transformation into a monochrome Arabness. This is a consequence of our universalist assumptions, but it is also an extension of our triumphalism, and our belief that the divine purposes can be read in history. 

Wa kalimat Allāhi biya’l-‘ulā — “God’s word is uppermost” (Qur’an 9: 40). The current agreement between zealots on both sides — Islamic and unbelieving — that Islam and Western modernity can have no conversation, and cannot inhabit each other, seems difficult given traditional Islamic assurances about the universal potential of revelation. The increasing number of individuals who identify themselves as entirely Western, and entirely Muslim, demonstrate that the arguments against the continued ability of Islam to be inclusively universal are simply false.

Yet the question, the big new Eastern Question, will not go away this easily. Palpably, there are millions of Muslims who are at ease somewhere within the spectrum of the diverse possibilities of Westernness. We need, however, a theory to match this practice. Is the accommodation real? What is the theological or fiqh status of this claim to an overlap? Can Islam really square this biggest of all historical circles, or must it now fail, and retreat into impoverished and hostile marginality, as history passes it by?

Let us refine this question by asking what, exactly, is the case against Islam’s contemporary claim to universal relevance? Some of the most frank arguments have come from European politicians, as part of their campaign to reduce Muslim immigration to Europe. This has, of course, become a prime political issue in the European Union, a local extension of a currently global argument.

Sometimes one hears the claim that Muslims cannot inhabit the West, or — as successful participants — the Western-dominated global reality,

because Islam has not passed through a reformation. This is a tiresome and absent-minded claim that I have heard from senior diplomats who simply cannot be troubled to read their own history, let alone the history of Islam. A reformation, that is to say, a bypass operation which avoids the clogged arteries of medieval history and seeks to refresh us with the lifeblood of the scriptures themselves, is precisely what is today underway among those movements and in those places which the West finds most intimidating. The Islamic world is now in the throes of its own reformation, and our Calvins and Cromwells are proving no more tolerant and flexible than their European predecessors.

A reformation, then, is a bad thing to ask us for, if you would like us to be more pliant. But there is an apparently more intelligible demand, which is that we must pass through an enlightenment. Take, for instance, the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn. In his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, he writes: “Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam”.

Fortuyn is not a marginal voice. His funeral at Rotterdam Cathedral, reverently covered by Dutch television, attracted a vast crowd of mourners. As his coffin passed down the city’s main street, the Coolsingel, so many flowers were thrown that the vehicle itself became invisible, recalling, to many, the scenes attending the funeral of Princess Diana. The election performance of his party a week later was a posthumous triumph, as his associate Hilbrand Nawijn was appointed minister for asylum and immigration. Fortuyn’s desire to close all Holland’s mosques was not put into effect, but a number of new, highly-restrictive, policies have been implemented. Asylum seekers now have to pay a seven thousand Euro deposit for compulsory Dutch language and citizenship lessons. A 90 percent cut in the budget of asylum seeker centres has been approved. An official government enquiry into the Dutch Muslim community was ordered by the new parliament in July 2002.

I take the case of the Netherlands because it was, until very recently, a model of liberalism and multiculturalism. Without wishing to sound the alarm, it is evident that if Holland can adopt an implicitly inquisitorial attitude to Islam, there is no reason why other states should not do likewise.

But again, the question has not been answered. Fortuyn, a highly-educated and liberal Islamophobe, is convinced that Islam cannot square the

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6 Ibid., 160, 169, 174.
circle. He would say that the past genius of Islam in adapting itself to cultures from Senegal to Sumatra cannot be extended into our era, because the rules of that game no longer apply. Success today demands membership of a global reality, which means signing up to the terms of its philosophy. The alternative is poverty, failure, and — just possibly — the B52s.

How should Islam answer this charge? The answer is, of course, that ‘Islam’ can’t. Islam’s strength stems in large degree from its internal diversity. Different readings of the scriptures attract different species of humanity. There will be no unified Islamic voice answering Fortuyn’s interrogation. The more useful question is: who should answer the charge? What sort of Muslim is best equipped to speak for us, and to defeat his logic?

Fortuyn’s error was to impose a Christian squint on Islam. As a practising Catholic, he imported assumptions about the nature of religious authority that ignore the multi-centred reality of Islam. On doctrine, we try to be united — but he is not interested in our doctrine. On fiqh, we are substantially diverse. Even in the medieval period, one of the great moral and methodological triumphs of the Muslim mind was the confidence that a variety of madhhabs could conflict formally, but could all be acceptable to God. In fact, we could propose as the key distinction between a great religion and a sect the ability of the former to accommodate and respect substantial diversity. Fortuyn, and other European politicians, seek to build a new Iron Curtain between Islam and Christendom, on the assumption that Islam is an ideology functionally akin to communism, or to the traditional churches of Europe.

The great tragedy is that some of our brethren would agree with him. There are many Muslims who are happy to describe Islam as an ideology. One suspects that they have not troubled to look the term up, and locate its totalitarian and positivistic undercurrents. It is impossible to deny that certain formulations of Islam in the twentieth century resembled European ideologies, with their obsession with the latest certainties of science, their regimented cellular structure, their utopianism, and their self-definition as advocates of communalism rather than metaphysical responsibility. The emergence of ‘ideological Islam’ was, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, entirely predictable. Everything at that time was ideology. Spirituality seemed to have ended, and postmodernism was not yet a twinkle in a Parisian eye. In fact, the British historian John Gray goes so far as to describe the process which Washington describes as the ‘war on terror’ as an internal Western argument which has nothing to do with traditional Islam. As he puts it: "The ideologues of political Islam are western voices, no less than Marx or Hayek. The struggle
with radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel”.

There are, of course, significant oversimplifications in this analysis. There are some individuals in the new movements who do have a substantial grounding in Islamic studies. And the juxtaposition of ‘political’ and ‘Islam’ will always be redundant, given that the Islamic, Ishmaelite message is inherently liberative, and hence militantly opposed to oppression.

Nonetheless, the irony remains. We are represented by the unrepresentative, and the West sees in us a mirror image of its less attractive potentialities. Western Muslim theologians such as myself frequently point out that the movements which seek to represent Islam globally, or in Western minority situations, are typically movements which arose as reactions against Western political hegemony that themselves internalised substantial aspects of Western political method. In Europe, Muslim community leaders who are called upon to justify Islam in the face of recent terrorist activities are ironically often individuals who subscribe to ideologised forms of Islam which adopt dimensions of Western modernity to secure an anti-Western profile. It is no surprise that such leaders arouse the suspicion of the likes of Pim Fortuyn, or, indeed, a remarkably wide spectrum of commentators across the political spectrum.

Islam’s universalism, however, is not well-represented by the advocates of movement Islam. Islamic universalism is represented by the great bulk of ordinary mosque-going Muslims who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the global reality. One could argue, against Fortuyn, that Muslim communities are far more open to the West than vice-versa, and know far more about it. Muslims return from the mosques in Cairo in time for the latest American soaps. There is no equivalent desire in the West to seek exposure to other cultures. On the ground, the West is keener to export than to import, to shape, rather than be shaped. As such, its universalism can seem imperial and hierarchical, driven by corporations and strategic imperatives that owe nothing whatsoever to non-Western cultures, and acknowledge their existence only where they might turn out to be obstacles. Islam, we will therefore insist, is more flexible than the West. Where they are intelligently applied, our laws, mediated through the due instruments of ijtihād, have been reshaped substantially by encounter with the Western juggernaut, through faculties such as the concern for public interest, or ‘urf — customary legislation. This is the reality of most modern Muslim jurisprudence. Western law and society, by contrast, have not admitted significant emendation at the hands of another culture for many centuries.

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7 The Independent, July 28, 2002.
From our perspective, then, it can seem that it is the West, not the Islamic world, which stands in need of reform in a more pluralistic direction. It claims to be open, while we are closed, but in reality, on the ground, it seems closed, while we have been open.

I think there is force to this defence. But does it help us answer the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn? Do we have to pass through his laundromat to be made internally white, as it were, to have an authentic and honoured place of belonging at the table of the modern reality?

Historians would probably argue that since history cannot repeat itself, the demand that Islam experience an enlightenment is anachronistic, and that if the task be attempted, it cannot remotely guarantee an outcome analogous to that experienced by Europe. If honest and erudite enough, they may also recognise that the enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought, and particularly the Islamised version of Aristotle which, via Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalised dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of credal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Christian and Jewish enlightenments of the eighteenth century did not move Europe in a religious, still less an Islamic direction. Instead, they moved outside the Moorish paradigm to produce a disenchantment, a desacralising of the world, which opened the gates for two enormous transformations in human experience. One of these has been the subjugation of nature to the will (or more usually the lower desires) of man. The consequences for the environment, and even the sustainable habitability of our planet, are looking increasingly disturbing. There is certainly an oddness about the Western desire to convert the Third World to a high-consumption market economy, when it is certain that if the world were to reach American levels of fossil-fuel consumption, global warming would soon render the planet entirely uninhabitable.

The second dangerous consequence of ‘enlightenment’, as Muslims see it, is the replacement of religious autocracy and sacred kingship with either a totalitarian political order, or with a democratic liberal arrangement that has
no fail-safe resistance to moving in a totalitarian direction. Take, for instance, the American Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs, for whom the Enlightenment did away with Jewish faith in God, while the Holocaust did away with Jewish faith in humanity. As he writes:

They lost faith in a utopian humanism that promised: ‘Give up your superstitions! Abandon the ethnic and religious traditions that separate us one from the other! Subject all aspects of life to rational scrutiny and the disciplines of science! This is how we will be saved’. It didn’t work. Not that science and rationality are unworthy; what failed was the effort to abstract these from their setting in the ethics and wisdoms of received tradition.8

Here is another voice from deep in the American Jewish intellectual tradition that many in the Muslim world assume provides the staunchest advocates of the Enlightenment. This time it is Irving Greenberg:

The humanistic revolt for the ‘liberation’ of humankind from centuries of dependence upon God and nature has been shown to sustain a capacity for demonic evil. Twentieth-century European civilization, in part the product of the Enlightenment and liberal culture, was a Frankenstein that authored the German monster’s being. [...] Moreover, the Holocaust and the failure to confront it make a repetition more likely — a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone — and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood.9

The West is loath to refer to this possibility in its makeup, as it urges, in Messianic fashion, its pattern of life upon the world. It believes that Srebrenica, or Mr Fortuyn, are aberrations, not a recurrent possibility. Muslims, however, surely have the right to express deep unease about the demand to submit to an Enlightenment project that seems to have produced so much darkness as well as light. Iqbal, identifying himself with the character Zinda-Rud in his Javid-name, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'rāj: Inghelāb-i Rūs u Ālmān did e am: ‘I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany’10. This in a great, final crying-out to God.

We European Muslims, born already amid the ambiguities of the Enlightenment, have also wrestled with this legacy. Alija Izetbegovic, the

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9 Irving Greenberg, “Judaism, Christianity and Partnership after the Twentieth Century”, in ibid., 26.
former Bosnian President, has discussed the relationship in his book *Islam Between East and West*. A lesser-known voice has been that of the Swedish theologian Tage Lindbom, who died three years ago. Lindbom is particularly important to European Muslim thought because of his own personal journey. A founder member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, and one of the major theorists of the Swedish welfare state, Lindbom experienced an almost Ghazalian crisis of doubt, and repented of his Enlightenment ideology in favour of a kind of Islamic traditionalism. In 1962 he published his book *The Windmills of Sancho Panza*, which generated enough of a scandal to force him from his job, and he composed the remainder of his twenty-odd books in retirement. For Lindbom, the liberation promised by the Enlightenment did not only lead to the explicit totalitarianisms which ruined most of Europe for much of the twentieth century, but also to an implicit, hidden totalitarianism, which is hardly less dangerous to human freedom. We are now increasingly slaves to the self, via the market, and the endlessly proliferating desires and lifestyles which we take to be the result of our free choice are in fact designed for us by corporation executives and media moguls.

There can be no brotherhood among human beings, Lindbom insists, unless there is a God under whom we may be brothers. As he writes: “The perennial question is always whether we humans are to understand our presence on this earth as a vice-regency or trusteeship under the mandate of Heaven, or whether we must strive to emancipate ourselves from any higher dominion, with human supremacy as our ultimate aim.”

He goes on as follows:

Secularization increasingly becomes identified with two motives: the reduction of human intelligence to rationalism, and sensual desire; the one is grafted onto the vertebral nervous system, and the other is a function of the involuntary and subconscious elements of man’s composite nature. Rationalism and sensualism will prove to be the mental currents and the two forms of consciousness whereby secularization floods the Western world. Human pride, *superbia*, the first and greatest of the seven deadly sins, grows unceasingly; and it is during the eighteenth century that man begins to formulate the notion that he is discovering himself as the earthly agent of power.

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15 Ibid., 22.
Lindbom’s warnings have provoked sharp discussion among Western Muslims in the universities. Enlightenment leads to sensualism and to rationalism. Walter Benjamin has already seen that it cannot guarantee that these principles will secure a moral consensus, or protect the weak.\footnote{Michael Löwy, \textit{On Changing the World: Essays in Political Philosophy, from Karl Marx to Walter Benjamin} (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press, 1993), 164–174.} It also — and here Lindbom has less to say — yields its own destruction. Western intellectuals now speak of post-modernism as an end of Enlightenment reason. Hence the new Muslim question becomes: why jump into the laundromat if European thinkers have themselves turned it off? Is the Third World to be brought to heel by importing only Europe’s yesterdays? \footnote{The implications of the collapse of Enlightenment reason for theology have been sketched out by George Lindbeck in his, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age} (London: SPCK, 1984); and for a more Islamic turn, because explicitly resistant to Suarez’s Renaissance-Aristotelian confidences, in the several works of Jean-Luc Marion, the Ash’arite resonances are clear enough: discourse is self-referential unless penetrated by the Word.}

These are troubled waters, and perhaps will carry us too far from our purpose in this lecture. Let me, however, offer a few reflections on what our prospects might look like if we excuse ourselves the duty of spinning in Mr Fortuyn’s machine.

Islam, as I rather conventionally observed a few minutes ago, speaks with many voices. Fortuyn, and the new groundswell of educated Western Islamophobia, have heard only a few of them, hearkening as they do to the totalitarian and the extreme. Iqbal, I would suggest, and Altaf Gauhar, represent a very different tradition. It is a tradition which insists that Islam is only itself when it recognises that authenticity arises from recognising the versatility of classical Islam, rather than taking any single reading of the scriptures as uniquely true. \textit{Ijtihād}, after all, is scarcely a modern invention.

Iqbal puts it this way:

\begin{quote}
  The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile in its life the categories of permanence and change. \footnote{Sir Muhammad Iqbal, \textit{Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam} (Lahore: Kapur Art Printing Works, 1930), 207.}
\end{quote}

In other words, to use my own idiom, it must square the circle to be dynamic. The immutable Law, to be alive, even to be itself, must engage with the mill-wheel of the transient.

One of Altaf Gauhar’s intellectual associates, Allahbakhsh Brohi, used the following metaphor:
We need a bi-focal vision: we must have an eye on the eternal principles sanctioned by the Qur’anic view of man’s place in the scheme of things, and also have the eye firmly fixed on the ever-changing concourse of economic-political situation which confronts man from time to time.\(^{19}\)

We do indeed need a bi-focal ability. It is, after all, a quality of the Antichrist that he sees with only one eye. An age of decadence, whether or not framed by an Enlightenment, is an age of extremes, and the twentieth century was, in Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, precisely that.\(^{20}\) Islam has been Westernised enough, it sometimes appears, to have joined that logic. We are either neutralised by a supposedly benign Islamic liberalism that in practice allows nothing distinctively Islamic to leave the home or the mosque — an Enlightenment-style privatisation of religion that abandons the world to the morality of the market leaders and the demagogues. Or we fall back into the sensual embrace of extremism, justifying our refusal to deal with the real world by dismissing it as absolute evil, as \textit{kufr}, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.

Traditional Islam, as is scripturally evident, cannot sanction either policy. Extremism, however, has been probably the more damaging of the two. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim both narrate from ‘A’ishah, (raḍī Allāh ‘anhhā), the \textit{ḥadīth} that runs: “Allah loves kindness in all matters”.\(^{21}\) Imām Muslim also narrates from Ibn Mas‘ūd, (raḍī Allāh ‘anhu), that the Prophet (ṣallā’llāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said: “Extremists shall perish” (\textit{ḥalaka’l-mutanāṭī’īn}).\(^{22}\) Commenting on this, Imām al-Nawāwī defines extremists as “fanatical zealots” (\textit{al-muta’ammiqa’īn al-ghālīm}).\(^{23}\)

Revelation, as always, requires the middle way, recognising that extremism seldom succeeds even on its own terms, and usually repels more people from religion than it holds within it. Attempts to reject all of global modernity simply cannot succeed, and have not succeeded anywhere. A more

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\(^{19}\) Allāhbakhsh Brohi, \textit{Iqbal and the Concept of Islamic Socialism} (Karachi: Aishah Bawani Trust, 1967), 7.


\(^{22}\) Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, Bāb Halak al-Mutanāṭī’īn.

sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness within the reality of the modern world.

It should not be hard to see where we naturally fit. The gaping hole in the Enlightenment, pointed out by the postmodern theologians and by more sceptical but still anxious minds, was the Enlightenment’s inability to form a stable and persuasive ground for virtue and for what it has called ‘citizenship’. David Hume expressed the problem as follows:

If the reason be asked of that obedience which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer: Because society could not otherwise subsist; and this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, Because we should keep our word. But besides that, nobody, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer; besides this, say, you find yourself embarrassed when it is asked, Why we are bound to keep our word? Nor can you give any answer but what would immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance. 24

But why are we bound to keep our word? Why need we respect the moral law? Religion seems to answer this far more convincingly than any secular ethic. In spite of all stereotypes, the degree of violence in the Muslim world remains far less than that of Western lands governed by the hope of a persuasive secular social contract. 25 Perhaps this is inevitable: the Enlightenment was, after all, nothing but the end of the Delphic principle that to know the world we must know and refine and uplift ourselves. Before Descartes, Locke and Hume, all the world had taken spirituality to be the precondition of philosophical knowing. Without love, self-discipline, and care for others, that is to say, without a transformation of the human subject, there could be no knowledge at all. The Enlightenment, however, foreshadowed by Descartes, would propose that the mind is already self-sufficient and that moral and spiritual growth are not preconditions for intellectual eminence, so that they might function to shape the nature of its influence upon society. Not only is the precondition of the transformation of the subject repudiated, but the classical idea, shared by the religions and the Greeks, that access to truth

itself brings about a personal transformation, is dethroned just as insistently. 26 Relationality is disposable, and the laundromat turns out to be a centrifuge.

Religion offers a solution to this fatal weakness. Applied with wisdom, it provides a fully persuasive reason for virtue and an ability to produce cultural and political leaders who embody it themselves. Of course, it is all too often applied improperly, and there is something of the Promethean arrogance and hubris of the _philosophes_ in the radical insistence that the human subject be enthroned in authority over scriptural interpretation, without a due prelude of initiation, love, and self-naughting. Yet the failure of the Enlightenment paradigm, as invoked by the secular elites in the Muslim world, to deliver moral and efficient government and cultural guidance, indicates that the solution _must_ be religious. Religious aberrations do not discredit the principle they aberrantly affirm.

What manner of Islam may most safely undertake this task? It is no accident that the overwhelming majority of Western Muslim thinkers, including Lindbom himself, have been drawn into the religion by the appeal of Sufism. To us, the ideological redefinitions of Islam are hardly more impressive than they are to the many European xenophobes who take them as normative. We need a form of religion that elegantly and persuasively squares the circle, rather than insists on a conflictual model that is unlikely to damage the West as much as Islam. A purely non-spiritual reading of Islam, lacking the vertical dimension, tends to produce only liberals or zealots; and both have proved irrelevant to our needs.

The most recurrent theme of Islamic architecture has been the dome surmounting the cube. Between the two there are complex arrangements of arabesques and pendentives. Religion is worth having because, drawing on the infinite and miraculous power of God, it can turn a circle into a square in a way that delights the eye. Through logic and definition the theologian seeks to show how the infinite engages with the finite. Imám al-Ghazálí (d. 505/1111), and our tradition generally, came to the conclusion that the Sufi does the job more elegantly, while not putting the theologian out of a job. But Sufism also, as Iqbal and the consensus of Muslim theologians in the West have seen, demonstrates other virtues. Because it has been the instrument whereby Islam has been embedded in the divergent cultures of the rainbow that is the traditional Islamic world, we may suppose that it represents the best

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26 This has been discussed with particular clarity by Michel Foucault, _L’Herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France (1981–2)_ (Paris: Gallimard and Seuil, 2001), 16–17.
instrument available for attempting a Muslim embedding within the West. It insists on the acquisition of compassion and wisdom as a precondition for the exercise of *ijtihād*, or of any other mode of knowing. Its emphasis on the potential grandeur of man’s condition, of the one who was “taught all the Names” (Qur’ān 2: 31), makes it more humane than any secular humanism. In short, its recognition of the limitations of rational attempts to square the circle of speaking of the metaphysical and in justifying virtue, can bring us to real, rather than illusory, enlightenment, to a true *isbrāq*. This is because there is only one “Light of the heavens and the earth” (Qur’ān 24: 35). Seeking truth in the many, while ignoring the One, is the cardinal, Luciferian error. Its consequences for recent human history have already been tragic. Its prospects, as it yields more and more methods of destruction, and fewer and fewer arguments for a universal morality, are surely unnerving. Genetic engineering now threatens to redefine our very humanity, precisely that principle which the Enlightenment found to be the basis of truth. 27 In such a world, religion, for all its failings, is likely to be the only force which can genuinely reconnect us with our humanity, and with our fellow men.

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27 For a pessimistic view of humanity’s ability to survive against its own technology, see Martin Rees, *Our Final Century: The 50/50 Threat to Humanity’s Survival* (London: Heinemann, 2003). The author is currently the British Astronomer Royal.