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Editorial

On Building World Peace

The world finds itself today in the grips of ever escalating and expanding crises, spiralling towards a total loss of faith in international politics and the disruption of the balance of powers not only at the levels of international law, humanitarian principles and moral values, but also at those of international relations and power hubs. This has led to intense turmoil all around the world, spreading chaos on many a level and exacerbating the anomalous and exceedingly deviant phenomena threatening world peace and security. Foremost among these phenomena is terrorism which has acquired so many diverse forms that it has become impossible to dissociate or differentiate them. The means and methods this terrorism is resorting to and its manifestations have become so multiple as to pose a threat to all, a danger besieging human civilization in general at unprecedented scopes, not even equalled by World War II of which the casualties exceeded tens of millions in Europe, Asia and Africa.

This terrifying deterioration of international politics has shaken the stability, cohesion and solidarity of the international community and driven off-course the policies of leading states labelled in political literature as the superpowers since they hold the means to deter, destroy and annihilate, as well as an immense power of influence, unlimited wealth and impressive scientific progress and technological edge. The greater their influence and the more expansive their power, the greater is these states' tendency to violate the United Nations Charter, either directly or indirectly, and the greater is their proclivity for different forms of extremism in their exercise of politics on the international scene, showing little regard for legal considerations, ethical principles or international norms. In fact, this wild tumult turns them into peace-annihilating states, as opposed to peace-builders.

That is the major problem and immense dilemma today's world has to bitterly endure as a result of the dissonance between the wish to destroy and

the desire to build, and of the outright contradiction between power and weakness, for the violation of international law is indeed a sign of weakness and not a source of power. At all events, good and evil cannot converge, war does not lead to peace and peace cannot evolve from war. What is true is true and what is false is false. Allah Almighty Says: ***[And Allah wipes out falsehood and establishes the truth by His Word. Verily, He knows well what [secrets] are in the breasts (of men).]***⁽¹⁾ and also: ***[And Allah willed that He should cause the Truth to triumph by His words, and cut the root of the disbelievers; That He might justify and prove falsehood false distasteful though it be to those in guilt.]***⁽²⁾.

Peace-building is not one of the prerogatives of the states that violate international law for it is a heavy industry that only those who can truly build peace can take up, surely not those with an unabashed affinity for destruction. For this reason, peace-building has always been founded on ideal principles and lofty values as opposed to physical power, high political stature, elevated status and active presence in the international arena, these being transient features, ephemeral manifestations and volatile positions that cannot be relied on to establish balanced and durable international relations on firm foundations that can withstand the vagaries of time and the fluctuations corrupting international politics. What counts most in this process is the power of wisdom, the strength of creative thought, and willpower that is governed by a live conscience, but more than anything else the power of the lofty values that inspired international laws and the light that guided the world's nations to draft the United Nations Charter in 1945. All these values spring primarily from the teachings of the eternal divine messages that advocate peace and steer towards the truth, goodness, justice and peace. Allah (SWT) says: ***[Wherewith Allah guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety and leadeth them out of darkness by His Will unto the light guideth them to a Path that is Straight.]***⁽³⁾.

(1) Ak-Shura (verse 24).

(2) Al-Anfal (verse 8).

(3) Al-Maidah (verse 16).

The preamble to the UN Charter states: **“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”** Tolerance and co-existence in peace and good-neighbourliness are first a moral obligation before being a legal and political commitment.

The same profound meanings are echoed in the preamble of the UNESCO Charter which reads: **“That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”** Peace is constructed in mature minds and is born through constructive ideas and noble human sentiments that urge for harmony and call for the strengthening of human brotherly ties. These principles are rooted in international law of which the violation, by all accounts, is a departure from the collective human will that shaped the charters of the United Nations and of UNESCO.

ISESCO follows along the same clear path and affirms in its charter that its objectives are **“to consolidate understanding among peoples inside and outside the Member States and contribute to the achievement of world peace and security through various means, particularly through education, science, culture and communication.”** This objective is asserted earlier in the Preamble to ISESCO’s Charter: **“The Governments of the Member States, Believing that Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance, represents a way of life and a spiritual, human, moral, cultural and civilizational force which made, and is still making, constructive contribution towards the shaping of the Islamic World and the**

development of human civilization.” The spiritual force, which is a human, moral, cultural and civilizational power, is what constructs peace in minds, and peace is built through the free will that can translate judicious ideas into tangible realities on the ground.

The conflict raging today between the superpowers vying for positions of influence in the heart of the Islamic world and in other parts of the world, flows in the direction of obstructing international efforts to establish peace and security, eliminate the causes behind the irruption of conflicts and the exacerbation of crises at many levels, in ways reminiscent of the cold-war era that opposed the two great poles. These great powers are neither morally nor humanly capable of engaging in global peace-building since they place their strategic interests above the higher interests of humanity. They have proven from past experience and from present times that they have little regard for international laws. Redressing this perverse situation is therefore incumbent upon the peace-loving states, to rouse the world's conscience, and to have faith in the solidarity of the international community in order to reinstate the respect of the UN Charter, abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ensure that the quest for peace prevails over the instinct of war kindling. Peace, or so it seems thus far, does not serve the interests of the big players on the international policy scene. These minds give priority to material interests and turn a blind eye to any ethical, cultural and civilizational considerations, disregarding the motivations for harmony and coexistence among nations and peoples, and failing to take into consideration the terrible tragedies suffered by the many populations afflicted by wars and crises. In these minds, the defences of peace cannot be constructed. On the contrary, they incite to war and spur evil wills towards conflicts that breed clashes, culminating in wars that have no purpose other than destruction and devastation.

If we carefully reflect on the international situation at this stage, and if we analyse the nature of the variables the world is battling with today, we will find that these superpowers are the ones standing behind the crises plaguing humanity these days. As far as we know, they are the ones feeding the fires of crises if not kindling them in the first place. They are the root of the problems besieging humanity and jeopardizing peace and security in today's world, but also in the future. European colonization, which operated under flimsy pretexts

and false lies (the need to civilize primitive societies) was a terrible invasion of the peoples it was afflicted upon. It was a violation of international law, of divine messages, and of human nature. Even more, colonization destroyed the edifices of peace, and its remnants and repercussions continue to undermine the power of those peoples and spawn problems, and to ignite crises, ethnic conflicts and doctrinal strife among their constituents, creating a climate that favours the destabilization and undermining of the vital interests of colonized peoples, always under false pretences such as advancing underdeveloped countries.

The European justification of colonization was to spread the values of civilization and the tools of urbanization in countries under occupation, citing numerous flimsy claims that were far removed from reality. Western states, especially superpowers, continue to rehash these justifications in a new discourse and with modern methods, claiming that they are working for world peace, while peace is the sad victim of their arrogant policies clashing with the true nature of things and the facts on the ground. The policies they pursue have deviated far from the principles of international legality. We can thus safely say that today's world is living a neo-colonial era, right under the eyes of the Security Council, the UN Assembly, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court. How can the world's conditions be stable and how can peace and security prevail when the situation is such as described?

Building world peace is not the duty of political leaders only, especially those of superpowers - in other words the UN Security Council permanent members-, but is at the heart of the noble cultural and civilizational mission that the scientific and intellectual elites are promoting as a creative and harmonious humanitarian collective that believes in the values of peace and strives for its prevalence on earth.

Today, the world is anxiously longing for an overall human awakening that would give a powerful boost to building a new world order on the basis of international law and not the law of force, great influence and prestige, and to preserve the principles of humanity, moral values, enlightened by and applying the eternal divine messages.

Impediments to Peace in Today's World: Dangers and Challenges

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri*

Many verses in the Noble Quran indicate that the norm in interactions with non-Muslims is peace and understanding, not war and conflict. The word «peace», in all its forms, is mentioned in the Holy Quran one hundred and forty times, while the word 'war', with its derivatives, was mentioned six times only. Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout, may God have mercy on his soul, considered that peace is a primordial state that favors cooperation and mutual acquaintance and the prevalence of goodness among people. If non-Muslims adhere to peace, they become the brothers of Muslims in humanity in the eyes of Islam⁽¹⁾. Ali Ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, is reported to have written in his letter to Malik ibn al-Ashtar when he appointed him as governor of Egypt: "*People are two kinds, either your brothers in religion, or your equals in humanity.*"

Since peace is the norm in human relations, it automatically becomes the desired purpose of all human beings, Muslims and followers of other religions alike. They all share a predisposition to peace, are partners in building and sustaining it and in overcoming its impediments and removing the obstacles barring its path. Peace is the umbrella under which all people seek shelter from the heat of strife and the weight of tensions that engender wars and conflicts.

Mankind are one universal community [*Mankind was one single nation.*]⁽²⁾
Differences in color and language are only a manifestation of God's creation

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(1) Sheikh Mohamed Shaltout: *al-Islam 'Aqida wa Shari'a*, page 394, 20th edition, Dar al-Shorouq, Cairo, 2010.

(2) *Al Baqara*, verse 213.

[And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know.]⁽³⁾ Good deeds undertaken for the greater good of all people are the only measure of difference: **[Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.]**⁽⁴⁾ It is based on this rule that Islam defines its perception of people, as diverse in colors and creeds as they may be.

For Islam, differences in color and language are a phenomenon that embodies the greatness of Allah the Creator, and how all mankind arose from a single origin and their religions sprang from one and the same source. Texts that set faith and good deeds alone as the criterion of superiority among people are highly significant. They clearly proclaim that if the followers of all religions adhere to the original teachings of their religions after purging them of additions, distortions, ambiguities and misunderstandings, there would be no reason to fear or be aggrieved about anything.⁽⁵⁾

Peace is indubitably the norm in human relations: **[O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole-heartedly.]**⁽⁶⁾ The formulation of greetings in Islam is peace, and the promised heaven in Islam is called the peaceable abode. The source of peace is also one of the most beautiful names of Allah: **[Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god;- the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Supreme.]**⁽⁷⁾ Islam makes provision for an objective self-censorship from within and from outside the human psyche in order to preserve world peace by seeking reforms first through counsel and then progressing to the use of force for deterrence: **[If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace**

(3) *Al-Rum*, verse 22.

(4) *Al-Baqara*, verse 62.

(5) Dr Mohamed Hamid Allah: *Dawlat al-Islam wal 'Alam*, page 70. Translated by Fathi Osman, *Silsilat al-Thaqafa al-Islamiyya* (38), Cairo. Undated.

(6) *Al-Baqara*, verse 208.

(7) *Al-Hashr*, verse 23.

between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah; but if it complies then make peace between them with justice and be fair: for Allah loves those who are fair (and just).]⁽⁸⁾ World peace therefore ensues from peace among individuals and groups, thus evolving progressively from peace with the self to peace with the community or society, then to peace with the surrounding before ultimately culminating in peace with humanity at large.

Peace, therefore, is reconciliation and peacefulness. It is also the return to the state of peace after hostilities: [***Therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (Guarantees of) peace, then Allah Hath opened no way for you (to war against them).***]⁽⁹⁾

War becomes legitimate by virtue of the necessity that makes the forbidden lawful, to fend off onslaughts and protect entities. Once war breaks out, Islam applies its own code of conduct which does not permit the killing of a woman, a child or a non-combatant monk, nor does it allow the pursuit of a retreating enemy or finishing off an injured person. Islam takes its guidance even to the battlefield in words and deeds [***If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah. And then escort him to where he can be secure.***]⁽¹⁰⁾ When the enemy shows signs of retreating, this signals the need to return to the initial state which is one of peace [***But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah.***]⁽¹¹⁾ Peace or its guarantee is the ultimate goal from beginning to end, and bringing those seeking shelter to safety in times of war is a legitimate duty in order to reinstate peace on earth and spread the wings of security over society.

While some interpreters consider that the intention behind the verse [***O ye who believe, enter into peace all of you***] is the state of non-war, others take

(8) *Al-Hujurat*, verse 9.

(9) *Al-Nissaa*, verse 90.

(10) *Al-Tauba*, verse 6.

(11) *Al-Anfal*, verse 61. Ibid, from the introduction of the translator, page 8.

it further to mean obedience and peacefulness, or in other words (to do all things goods and all forms of righteousness), or (enter into Islam in its entirety and with all its provisions and laws). If we contemplate this verse we will see that the link between entering into a full state of peace and not following Satan's temptations is an injunction from the Almighty not to fall into the state opposite to peace, which is any state in which the lead of Satan is taken. This is the state of turmoil and chaos that God described as worse than murder itself. This is how it is possible to understand this noble verse in light of verse 61 of al- Anfal where peace is described as the antithesis of war.

Peace, one of Allah's beautiful names, is used to convey the sense of peacefulness that Allah described himself by, using the noun form to express the ultimate in peacefulness or the quintessence of peace and intimating that the Almighty's attributes can only be devoid of injustice or tyranny. There is one hadith that states that Allah is peace and peace is from Him. This is the true source of peace in Islam and it permeates the Muslim persona, turning it into an advocate of peace in words and deeds. The Muslim promotes the values of peace, contributes to overcoming the obstacles hindering the road to this peace and avoids any elements that could result in a declaration of war.

These are the profound meanings that convey the sense of peace as perceived from the perspective of Islam and which must remain alive in the Muslim conscience. These meanings are the true source of the contemporary notion of peace that is enshrined in international law. Much can be said on this subject though now is not the time to indulge in it, and I have published a number of in-depth studies on some of its aspects, both in English and in French.⁽¹²⁾

(12) Such as '*Islam and Religious Coexistence on the Threshold of the 21st Century*' (1998), *Human Rights in the Teachings of Islam* (2011), *The State and Human Rights in Islamic Thought* (2014), *Democracy from an Islamic Perspective* (2005) and *Islamic Diplomacy at the Service of Dialogue and Peace*, all of which are publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

(13) Emile Amine: *Dawr al-Adyane fi Siyadat Mafhoum al-Salam al-'Alami, al-Tafahum Magazine*, issue 37, 2012, Muscat.

There is no doubt that the classic definition of peace is the state contrary to war and violence. In this state, an atmosphere of tranquility, serenity and quietude prevails, as opposed to fear, anxiety and turmoil. Peace is the opposite of conflict and the antithesis of verbal and physical violence, be it between individuals or groups and States. It is also proof that mankind's primordial state is one of peace. However, conflict has existed on earth since humanity numbered less than the fingers of one hand. This landscape later evolved into one of conflict between man and the environment, causing Earth to lose its peace.⁽¹³⁾ The situation also evolved into conflicts between nations and peoples, and in many cases into conflicts that divide the same people, under the pressures, manipulations and influences of foreign parties that plot to destroy the cohesive fabric of national unity and jeopardize social peace.

In today's world, there are many obstacles to the establishment of peace and security, undermining oppressed peoples' rights, dignity and freedom. The most important of these obstacles are:

- 1. Conflicts between powerful countries holding the veto right at the UN Security Council and which give precedence to their own interests and serve their strategies at the expense of world peace and security. This right has been used many times to abort decisions that could have contributed to establishing peace and preventing injustice and oppression, and thus would have protected the world from the pitfalls of conflict and extremism.**
- 2. The industry and trade of arms that feed and thrive on wars, conflicts and tension. These are a corrupt industry and trade since their outcome is invariably desolation and murder, evolving outside the scope of United Nations resolutions. In fact, superpowers often seek to test their new weapons in fabricated wars that massacre innocent people in different parts of the world.**
- 3. Religious and ethnic fanaticism that spawns violent extremism and hatred and is a source and a motive of terrorism.**
- 4. The greed and covetousness of major powers for the wealth of developing countries and their markets, and their support of corrupt regimes that facilitate the fulfillment of these ambitions. This results**

in conflicts and domestic strife and maintains these countries in a constant state of chaos, backwardness and dependency.

- 5. The imbalance of the global economic system and the deep disparities it creates among social strata where the poor grow poorer and the wealthy amass more riches. This fuels anger and resentment and leads to unrest, conflict and the squandering of efforts and time.**

In light of these impediments, developments and the fast-paced transformations unfolding in today's world and that carry within them momentous challenges and grave dangers in many ways, the al-Azhar World Peace Conference will discuss the challenges to world peace, examine ways to overcome these challenges, and develop a road map with the intent of improving the security of nations and societies and building a solid foundation of social peace, harmony and co-existence under universal justice, security and global harmony.

The pragmatic study of these challenges and threats, regardless of their nature, can yield very important results that pave the way for dealing with their ensuing complications and halt their repercussions. Multi-pronged political and security processes, though crucially important and with an undisputed impact, are not always cost-effective if they are not backed up by thorough methodological studies by experts, researchers and academics with extensive know-how and specialized knowledge. Thought is combined with action, and theory with application on the ground. It is thus essential to link the promotion of peace with the consolidation of the culture of dialogue as a means of highlighting the strong correlation between peace and dialogue. There can be no durable and firmly-seated peace without a responsible dialogue between stakeholders within the same country and then between stakeholders within a given region, after which dialogue ascends to the plane of the entire human family, regardless of the diversity of cultures and religions.

In its profound sense and broad meaning, any dialogue that serves as a prelude to peace can have neither threshold nor limit, and that is the dialogue of cultures and civilizations and the followers of all religions. It is also the dialogue of citizens within the same state, regardless of their different inclinations, doctrines and orientations, South-South dialogue, and the dialogue of the Mediterranean Basin countries, a region to which the roots

of all three divine religions can be traced. The common objective of all these forms of dialogue, despite their different fields and motivations, is to build peace in minds and on earth in order to bring about a safe and prosperous future for all mankind.

With this theoretical foundation in mind, the promotion of dialogue and peace values becomes a guarantee of security, of the prevalence of stability and the consolidation of peace at all levels. Exploring the optimal and most effective ways of promoting these values also becomes the gateway to establishing peace, with the profound connotations such statement entails. The correlation between dialogue and peace becomes irreducible since dialogue paves the way for and leads to peace. The noble values common to these two components are the lofty moral values that predominantly arise from the divine messages and human cultures that have accumulated over the course of time and have come to embody the sum of inherited wisdom and profound human contents that constitute the thread running down the ages. These values need to be anchored in minds and hearts through educational curricula, advocacy platforms, thought and culture forums and through the media.

The culture of peace serves as a broad base for the culture of dialogue and on all fronts and stems from divine religions. Cultural peace is the cornerstone of actual peace on earth because it embodies peace of mind, spirit and conscience. It is a consolidation of security, the strengthening of cooperation, and the achievement of political integration, economic prosperity and social development in the effort to confront escalating threats of violence, extremism and fanaticism, the spread of terrorism under all its forms, the high rates of forced and voluntary migration, human trafficking, spiraling organized crime, drug trafficking and arms smuggling, as well as the spread of atheism and debauchery and their role in the corruption of human life.

All of these are serious challenges and dangers that hamper peace-building efforts. They can only be confronted and overcome by advancing the principles of a global peace founded on values of a creative dialogue that promotes healthy relations between nations and peoples, based on mutual respect, the rejection of fanaticism and extremism and the promotion of the culture of peace, harmony and peaceful coexistence.

One of the weighty challenges and threats facing the world today, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, is the spiraling phenomenon of terrorism. This senseless and savage phenomenon is utterly rejected by Islam and criminalized by international law. Terrorism, in all its forms and under any name, is the farthest removed from Islam which advocates justice, compassion, mercy, peace, the respect of human dignity and the prevention of bloodshed and of all kinds of corruption on earth. Thus, when politicians, intellectuals and media institutions in the West associate terrorism with Islam they are in fact expressing contempt for the true faith, fabricating fallacies and distorting the truth. Islam is innocent of terrorist groups, terrorism is utterly reprehensible and terrorists are despicable murderers who are totally condemned by Muslims.

This confirms in absolute terms the need for fairness and equity in the way Islam is perceived by those who direct the arrows of slander at it and consider it liable for what is in fact extraneous to it. The culture of peace in Islam is much nobler than a mere political culture or a transient fad. It is so deeply-seated and well established as to be part and parcel of the perennial components of the Muslim personality. Peace is a lofty value that has been promoted by all religions, except when perverted by some the followers of these religions who prefer to sow dissent and enmity among people and to spread injustice and tyranny in violation of the rights of peoples.

Religious leaders from all backgrounds and levels and who carry the torch of peace, shoulder today and at all times the weighty responsibility of disseminating the culture of peace, religious coexistence and the values of tolerance. These leaderships have the advantage of the ability to strongly influence their followers by steering thoughts towards rationality and religious awareness, both of which keep human beings at shelter from the pitfalls of deviation and extremism and from sliding into the perils of harming themselves and others, violating rights and undermining dignity.

These leaders are the peacemakers, as long as they are guided by divine messages. Once they deviate from this divine guidance, they become, unknowingly, the makers of war.

Today's reality has shown that many of the wars and conflicts playing out in various parts of the world are the result of religious extremism, sectarian strife,

the corrupt understanding of the principles of religion, and the misinterpretation of religious texts by groups claiming to be right and considering all others as wrong. This prompts us to say that those who use religion to justify belligerence and to corrupt the earth, those who see themselves as religious leaders with the “divine mandate” to change the world by the force of arms, are in fact the enemies of God, the nemeses of religion and the guardians of evil. They must be dealt with carefully, using different methods of influence and an enlightened mind, resorting to tight coordination and cooperation to join efforts in order to instate peace on earth and spread the values of tolerance, coexistence and harmony among nations and peoples.

This is the key duty of religious leaders, whether they speak for Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other creeds followed by the world’s tapestry of nations, because these leaders are meant to hold the torch of peace high and because religion is in truth the quintessence of peace.

The war waged today on Islam by extremists, both abroad and at home, is in fact a war directed at all religions. Its goal is to eliminate religiosity and break the bond between man and religious faith, in order to give free rein to fallacies, deviant principles and global chaos. His eminence the Grand Imam Sheikh Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb shed more clarity on this bitter reality when he said at the conference on “**Freedom and citizenship: diversity and integration**”: **“If religious institutions in the East and the West do not join efforts to confront it, Islamophobia will soon or late extend its claws to Christianity and Judaism. When that happens, no good will come from repeating the old piece of wisdom, “You killed me when you killed the black ox”. Those who lie in wait to ambush religion are all atheists who proclaimed the death of God and are singing the tune of material philosophies. They rise from the dungeons of Nazism and Communism, advocate drug use, the destruction of the family, the establishment of the gender system and abortionism.”**⁽¹⁴⁾

(14) Speech of the Grand Imam at the *International Conference on Freedom and Citizenship: diversity and integration*, jointly organized in Cairo on 28 February-1 March 2017 by al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Muslim Elders Council.

The Sheikh of al-Azhar went on to say at this Conference: **"This is the appeal that is gaining in momentum and evolving today, demanding that this become one of the prerogatives of the European Union. All these calls and many others are rearing their heads in full force and will sweep divine religions on their path because, for them, they are the source of all wars. Christianity was the cradle of the Crusades, Islam spreads terror and blood, and there is no better solution but to obliterate religion from the face of the earth. Yet, they choose to remain as silent as a tomb about the casualties of the civil wars triggered by atheists and secularists early and towards the middle of the previous century, wars that had absolutely nothing to do with religion. Yet, any child beginning his learning journey can effortlessly pass in review the victims of modern social trends, to establish that out of all the victims of religion, from pre-religious to modern times, history has inventoried numbers that do not even represent one tenth of the tenth of the millions of victims felled, murdered, exiled and tortured in the name of prophecies of which not a single one materialized. Instead, it was simply proven beyond doubt that such prophecies are impossible to materialize."**⁽¹⁵⁾

Reality on the ground attests to the veracity of the words of His Eminence the Grand Imam. The rising tide of hatred and what has become known as Islamophobia is strong evidence that the world will witness further nefarious developments that will exacerbate the threats to world peace. Atheism, religious denigration and the battle waged by the non-religious against these religions all constitute threats to world peace.

In his famous book *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, Swiss writer Hans Kung⁽¹⁶⁾ stresses that no peace can exist between nations in the absence of peace between religions. An in-depth analysis of Hans Kung's thought leads us to the conclusion that this author earnestly perceives religions as messages of peace and not as tools for adversity. He believes that we live at a

(15) Ibid.

(16) This book was translated into Arabic by Rania Khallaf and published in 2007 by Dar al-Shorouq in Cairo.

time when man possesses modern, old and in between technological means and that the followers of religions, especially the three revealed religions, should do everything in their power to avoid war and to disseminate peace instead. To achieve this, there is no other way but to reread and reinterpret each of the stories that make up their religious legacies.⁽¹⁷⁾

The state of relations between the followers of religions, influenced by the state of turbulence prevailing today on the international scene, betrays a considerable failing of the culture of peace in minds and hearts, widespread mistrust and apprehension, and sometimes even hatred and rejection. It is therefore necessary for the concerned leaders of religious groups, thinkers and opinion makers to close ranks in order to spread the values of tolerance in a culture where the Other is accepted and engaged in dialogue to bring hearts closer and confront the currents of fanaticism, hatred, violence and terrorism. The ultimate aim of this worthy endeavor is to spread peace among people and empower them on earth.

Many efforts are undertaken by al-Azhar al-Sharif and other Islamic and international organizations and institutions such as the **King Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue** which launched the program “**United against violence in the name of religion**”, and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which has and continues to implement programs and activities for the promotion of the culture of peace and intercultural and interfaith dialogue. These include events such as the International Conference on “**Promoting a culture of mutual respect and human solidarity among the followers of religions**”, carried out in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Dialogue in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 18-20 September 2015. All these efforts, if reinforced by similar actions by religious institutions and bodies from other religions, will be an important step towards the edification of world peace.

The culture of peace is a lofty value in religions, and its dissemination is a noble mission. That is the mission that brings us together with the followers of other religions who share our sense of this historic responsibility at a difficult

(17) Ibid.

juncture and in these perilous circumstances. God Almighty says: "***Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed.***"⁽¹⁸⁾

Allah the Almighty also says: [***Verily thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, in the matters wherein they differ (among themselves).***]⁽¹⁹⁾

Let us then strive to reduce the chasm between us and expand the base of harmony, as only thus would we have obeyed Allah and dedicated all devotion to Him [***Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due?***]⁽²⁰⁾

(18) *Al-Baqara*, verse 213.

(19) *Al-Sajda*, verse 25.

(20) *Al-Zumar*, verse 3.

Islam in Modern Times

Dr Annemarie Schimmel*

Muslim scholars have from the very beginning raised important questions about the malleability of Islam and its suitability for changing circumstances and different eras, and about the ways to prevent the alteration of the Islamic Sharia. Following the Mongol incursions against the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, leading to its fall in 1258 A.D. (656 A.H.), the then customary Islamic political regimes changed. The Hanbali school of thought was developed by Ibn Taymiyah who passed away in 1328 A.D. (728 A.H.) and who dedicated all his endeavors to the preservation of the Islamic way of life against the factors of change. He saw in the Holy Quran and the Prophet's noble Sunnah the foundations of Islamic life and religious ij̄tihād, and suffered through many hardships as a result of his unyielding positions.

Ibn Taymiyah provided a model that was emulated by many reformists who strived for a new interpretation of the Holy Quran and sought to infuse a sense of renewal into the Islamic way of life in the eighteenth century. These reformers set for themselves the primary target of reforming the social and political conditions in which Muslims lived, especially as European colonialism began to take root in Islamic countries. Prominent among these reformers was the imam Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab who lived in the Arab Peninsula and whose subsequent following included many Salafi movements, labeled by some thinkers as Wahhabism. The followers of Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab, known as the «Muwahidin» entered the Hijaz and Mecca between 1803 and

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1806 aided by the family of Prince Saud, and their movement was given a new lease of life with the end of World War I. When the Al Saud firmly established their rule in the region, these ideas spread to all parts of the Arab Peninsula. Around the same time, some Indians were studying in Mecca, most notable among them was Shah Walliuallah (died in 1762), the descendent of a pious family from Delhi, India. When Walliuallah returned home, he tried to propose a new interpretation of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah in such a way as to prove the flexibility of the Quranic meanings and their adaptability to the circumstances of the times. The main challenge facing Indian Muslims was understanding the Arabic meanings of the Holy Quran. Walliuallah thus interpreted the meanings of the Holy Quran into Farsi which was at the time the language of educated Indians. His children later on translated the meanings of the Quran into Urdu for the very same purpose. Walliuallah rejected popular misconceptions about Islam and was able in his opus *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*⁽¹⁾ to identify the causes of the Indians' political weakness and the deterioration of their living conditions. Thus, his masterpiece ushered in an era considered as the true beginning of a new chapter in the history of Islam in India. His contemporaries spread the principles of Sufism in Delhi, particularly the Sufi poet Mir Dard who studied Sufi teachings among the disciples of his father who founded⁽²⁾ the Tariqa Muhammadiya. Half a century later, this tariqa became the Jama'a of Indian freedom fighters against British rule.

Sufi schools became the means through which their followers could practice their religious rites in the mid-eighteenth century. Similar tariqas emerged in Algeria and Morocco under the name of the Tijaniyya tariqa. Its followers spread out into the Sudan and the middle of the Arab Muslim world. The Snoussi tariqa was established in northern and Central Africa. Through the Tijaniyya, Sufi principles were popularized in Hausa-speaking African

(1) Several editions of this book were published, including the one issued in two volumes in Beirut by Dar al-Jeel in 2005, authenticated by Sheikh Syed Sabiq.

(2) Khawja Mir Dard Dehlavi (1720-1785). He wrote a poem collection of 1500 verses which was translated into Arabic in prose form by Dr Hazem Mhfouz and in verse form by Dr Houssaine Moujib Al-Masry (Islam Today).

environments such as in Senegal, subsequently giving birth to other Sufi communities. Around 1802, these fellowships called for the establishment of the Sokoto kingdom under the leadership of Osman Dan Fudio. Islam gained greater power in West Africa thanks to these fellowships, although the spread of Islam in West Africa stretched over a very long time since the twelfth century.

Western powers appeared on the global political scene from the 18th century, especially in India. British colonists allowed the granting of some financial support to religious schools such as agricultural lands that were in reality religious endowments. The son of Shah Waliullah declared that British India was to be considered a house of war. The British changed the official language from Farsi to English in 1835. The majority of Muslims refrained from sending their children to English missionary schools. Indians suffered from a lack of renewal and spirit of modernity and were denied access to jobs in civilian life while Sikhs and Hindus benefitted from this opportunity and strengthened their relations with the colonizer. Their children studied at English schools founded by Christian missionaries in India. The effects of colonization and the spread of foreign education in India, the Philippines and other countries resulted in the emergence of a class of population that came to be known as the Elite, while Muslims were portrayed as the instigators of rebellion against colonialism.

Egypt suffered through Napoleon's military campaign in 1798. Although this campaign provoked a scientific and academic renaissance in Egypt,⁽³⁾ and French became available to some Egyptian youth, the country's failed economic and financial policy in the nineteenth century led to the worsening of its situation and to the intervention of British forces in the country in 1882. Then Lord Cromer became the British Controller-General and was put in charge of the affairs of the country, while the position of the Ottoman governor became an honorary position acting beside him. Syria succumbed to chaos and Lebanese territories were divided into districts in line with religious affiliation in 1821. The effects of this division are still visible today.

(3) This is an erroneous association since the era of Renaissance began in Egypt with Mohamed Ali Pasha, whose era began in 1805.

The French managed to secure new interests in Morocco, and the Italians dedicated their efforts to eliminating the Senoussi movement in Libya. The Ottoman Sultanate suffered from the expansion of the British at its expense, leading the Sultan to ask the Germans for assistance. The situation in Iran worsened as well when it was invaded in 1827 via its northern borders by Russian forces. Ardabil, a sacred city for the Safavid dynasty, fell into the hands of occupation.

It was only natural that reform movements would thrive among Muslims under such political conditions and with the deterioration of the economic situation in the Islamic world for the benefit of foreign occupiers. Mention should be made here of Islamic movements in the first place, namely the so-called Salafi movements that believed that the way to confront Western colonialism is through adherence to the thought of the righteous predecessors from among the imams of Islam. These movements found all they were looking for in Ibn Taymiyyah's thought and sought to come up with a new interpretation of Islam on the basis of the Holy Quran, the Prophet's Sunnah and the tradition of the Salaf. One such prominent salafist was Jamal Eddine al-Afghani (d. 1897). He was an inspiration to many leaders of national liberation movements, including Imam Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905) and his pupil Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) in Egypt⁽⁴⁾. Muhammad Abdu called for opening the door of religious *ijtihad* after the end of the era of *imams* in the Middle Ages. The Cairene magazine ***Al-Manar*** (1898-1940)⁽⁵⁾ served as a platform from

(4) See the vision of Imam Muhammad Abdu and his reformist approach to Egypt's renaissance in the book:

Muhammed Abduh: Eine Untersuchung seiner Erziehungsmethode zum und zur nationalen Erhebung in Muhammed El-Bahay, Humburg 1936.

See our Arabic translation of the book itself entitled *Imam Muhammad Abduh: Dirasa li Manhajih al-Tarbawi min Ajjal-Wa'yi al-Watani wa Nahdat al-Ummah* by Dr. Mohammed Mohammed Al-Bahhy, in *Dirasat Islamiyya*, No. 48, Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, 1999.

(5) ***Al-Manar*** was suspended for seven months after the second issue of the 35th volume, following the death of its owner Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Rida, and until the magazine's editor's position was assigned to the Syrian authenticator Sheikh Bahja al-Bitar who resumed the *tafsir* and finished the surah of Yusuf. However, he left the magazine after two issues only (the 3rd and 4th issues (year 35)). The magazine was once again halted for nearly three years until the family of Sheikh Rashid Rida asked Sheikh Hassan al-Banna to take up its management on 18 July 1939. The 10th issue (Volume 35) was released in September 1940, this being the last issue ever released of this magazine (***Islam Today***).

which reformists and advocates of renewal expressed their opinions. Since then, they became known as *Jama'at al-Manar*. Their message asserted that Islam was in full symbiosis with the times and with civilizational renewal. They endeavored to consecrate their vision through a new interpretation of the Quran that asserts this vision.

Egypt was not the only theater of such new visions. In fact, they spread in many Islamic countries and varied in approaches, fulfilling the goal of asserting that the Holy Quran addresses universal truths, especially such aspects of science and technology as the splitting of the atom and others. These innovative ideas found fertile soil in India where, faced by a zealous missionary activity, reformists sought to emphasize that Islam does not preach blind attachment to bygone eras, but rather calls for looking forward to the future, and that it was a universal religion suitable for all humanity. Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) was the most prominent advocate of reform and renewal, although Jamal Eddine al-Afghani rejected his approach and many faulted him for his neutrality. His success materialized in the creation of the Anglo-Islamic College in Aligarh which later turned into a center and university for reformatory thought. Syed Ahmed Khan opposed the participation of Muslims in the Indian National Congress in 1885, fearing that the Muslim bloc would turn into a minority in parliament. Another movement, known as Sufi Salafism, was opposed to the British Islamic College and called for the non-division of the Indian subcontinent between Muslims and Hindus. Syed Ahmed Khan left a large collection of works in Urdu. Calls were made for the establishment of schools similar to his in Bengal, Sindh and Hyderabad.

In 1897, Syed Amir Ali wrote his book *The Spirit of Islam*⁽⁶⁾ where he explained the essence of the Islamic civilization. The author asserted that Islam not only calls for civilizational progress, but is in fact a progressive religion compared to the history of humanity. When the Muslim League movement was established in 1906, it became easier to represent the affairs of the Muslim world at international forums, but the League gradually lost its international luster and influence after World War I. Although Gandhi

(6) Translated into Arabic by Amine Mahmoud Al-Sharif and Mohammad Badrane, and published as part of the series "One Thousand Books" under the title "*Ruhu Al-Islam*".

supported the Indian Muslim movement which advocated the adoption of the Ottoman Caliphate model as the spiritual authority of India's Muslims, it disintegrated when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk officially declared the end of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey on March 3, 1924. Since then, the following question has remained unanswered: Who is the next legitimate representative of the caliph for Turkish Muslims? This question played an important role in facing the secularist tendencies represented by Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) who considered the Constituent Assembly of Turkey as the legitimate authority in that country. Can we consider the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Organization of Islamic Cooperation today) as the legitimate representative of all Muslims? Around the same time, another question was raised: What could be considered as the makings of an Islamic state? This is a question that still needs a convincing answer. With the fall of the Ottoman Sultanate, many questions were raised about the interplay of national goals with Islamic interests in general. Should the proposed Islamic state be a religious or a democratic state? The advocates of democracy based their argument on the Islamic principle that calls for shura among Muslims, as stated in the verse: [***Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance.***]⁽⁷⁾. It was set in minds that this verse is proof of the need to build a democratic state.

The Ahmadiyya was an Islamic movement emerged in India and that must be mentioned it, albeit briefly. This movement was the fruit of the endeavors of the late Mirza Ghulam Ahmed who passed away in 1908. His followers regarded him as the promised Mahdi or the Messiah. Conservative Muslims opposed these ideas because they violated the essence of Muhammad's message and many riots broke out in 1953 because of the Ahmadiyya sect in Pakistan. However, the reasons for this were primarily political. In 1974, this group was declared as heretic.

Muhammad Iqbal, the reformist thinker, was the only opponent posing a serious threat to the Ahmadiyya movement. He studied philosophy in England and Munich, unlike most reformers who did not study European

(7) *Shura*, verse 38.

languages and cultures. He received his doctorate in the evolution of Persian Sufi thought, and studied Hegel, Bergson, Goethe, Nietzsche, Einstein and others. Iqbal's main goal was to link these philosophies and Western ideas to the precepts and teachings of Islam. He realized that the fundamentals of Islam, manifest in its dynamism, were in contradiction with classical Hellenistic ideas. He saw in Islam a message calling for progress and aiming for human advancement and elevation. Man is God's representative on earth. Islam admits the ongoing struggle against the forces of evil so that Man strives for moral and intellectual perfection. Iqbal considered that Nietzsche's view of freedom which transcends human liberty was clearly represented in the Islamic principle that designates Man as the servant of Allah and Allah alone. And this is how freedom attains its most sublime plane, and that is what is exemplified by the noble Prophet as the servant of Allah. He reached the highest status a prophet could possibly aspire to in honor and knowledge of the universe and the heavens.

Iqbal saw in Islam the ideal foundation for building the state and shaping its policy since Islam is the only religion that protects the brotherhood in humanity of all believers and the only bastion of monotheism. Iqbal expressed these views in a series of lectures he gave at Indian universities on the reformation of Islamic thought in 1928, which he explained from a philosophical angle. His views were illustrated in a collection of poetic works in Urdu and Farsi. His vision, known as the *Message from the East* was in fact a response to Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*.

Imam Maulana Jalaluddin al-Rumi embodied the greatest spiritual inspiration for Iqbal. One senses in Iqbal's writings the infinite divine love that takes Man to the most elevated stations of all. This legacy resonates with what is often seen in al-Rumi's writings. Iqbal's poetic and philosophical ideas became one of the most important foundations in the edification of the state of Pakistan, hence his consideration as the spiritual father of Pakistan.

The Second World War affected the partitioning of the Muslim world as many countries took shape on the world's map - Libya, Pakistan and Indonesia - and the Arab Islamic world acquired an influential role in global policy-making. However, the creation of the State of Israel in the Arab region is a thorny issue for the Arab world, hence the diversity in the policies of Muslim

countries. On the one hand, there is Gaddafi in Libya, Muslims in Central Asia and the Islamic culture in China representing a spectrum of diversity that has been taking shape over the last century. On the other hand, there is the religious movement in Saudi Arabia and its wide spread in the world, and the influential role it plays in shaping the ideological perception of Muslims through institutions such as the League⁽⁸⁾ and the generous funding it extends.

Islam spread in secular Turkey through the influence of Sufi tariqas which spread to Central Asia thanks to Muslim traders, just as it spread in Indonesia. All these variations seemed to contradict the religious perceptions of Muslims in black Africa. Muslim Turkey represents a unique case that needs further research. Sociologist Mehmed Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) advocated openness onto the West, Turkish Islamism and nationalism. Thus, Kemal Atatürk's reforms were aimed at separating Turkey's present from its old Islamic past. This break was not limited to religion matters only but went beyond that to replace the Arabic alphabet used by the Ottomans with the Latin script. The Ottoman alphabet, which had been used by the Turks for hundreds of years, embodied the belonging of the Turkish language to the Eastern Islamic environment. When establishing a religious studies college in 1949, additional curricula were introduced, such as sociology and the history of religions, along with da'wa and fiqh, all of which constituted a renewal movement in traditional religious sciences. Those were promising beginnings. Such educational setup cannot be found in any other country. In Pakistan, and over the past 10 years, the number of religious schools has increased along with that of schools with liberal orientations. Sufi and conservative currents live side by side, but the situation is different in secular India where a Muslim minority of 100 million people lives. There was a strong receptiveness of Sufism in which the Muslim minority may have found something to allay its fears vis-à-vis the Hindu majority. But the situation in Egypt is in constant dynamic change with a noticeably growing tendency towards religious commitment.

The boom that occurred in Iran, where the state system shifted from a vigorous pursuit of the West under the Safavid dynasty to the Islamic

(8) The author means the Muslim World League.

Republic of Iran, has surprised international observers. The stance of the vast majority of Muslim countries vis-à-vis modernity is until today one of skepticism. It is possible to understand the theoretical basis of modern Iran through a reading of the writings of Ali Shariati who absorbed some of the ideas of Iqbal and gave them a new shape although Iqbal's ideas are rejected by the Wahhabis in the Arab Gulf environment. It thus becomes possible to understand the growing trends of conservative fundamentalism. On the one hand, the majority does not see the significance of lost ideals and thus turns to the golden era of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. Similarly, liberal ideas did not achieve enough maturity or clarity. The result was that the individual has become convinced that liberalism or socialism are of no use in solving the problems of the Islamic world. Clearly, the best solution then lies in the glorious past of Islam which provides protection and presents solution and salvation. It is worth mentioning that a term such as secularism has not been properly defined and continues to be explained as the act of moving away from religion. The adjective 'secularist' has become a synonym for a non-religious person, and thus acquire a negative connotation. Advocates of modernity have called for linking Islam to renewal and portrayed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a socialist at times, and a Marxist at others.⁽⁹⁾

A key issue facing Islamic conservative movements is the position of women. The question is: Should women be kept away from public life? Many politicians and university professors in Muslim countries and in Pakistan are trying to enlighten women about their legitimate and civil rights within society. Saudi Arabia has solved this problem by authorizing women to work in girls' colleges only.

The issue of Islamic banks has been raised in recent years and there have been many discussions around this subject, especially since the Holy Quran prohibits interest-based transactions. The views and interpretations on the possibility of financial transactions diverge, especially when dealing with international institutions. Mention should be made of the increasing numbers of Muslim women studying in European universities, including Pakistan's former Prime

(9) This led Muslim thinkers to refuse linking Islam with these doctrines since the social justice advocated by Islam predated all these doctrines and trends.

Minister (Benazir Bhutto). We have noted a tendency among newly converted Muslim women towards conservatism and attachment to the Sunnah of the Salaf. Among Muslim migrants, some see that strong attachment to religion is one way of preserving cultural identity vis-à-vis the other. The numbers of migrants from Muslim countries are clearly on the increase.

Worth of note is the phenomenon of the growing Turkish labor force in Germany, or the steady streams of migrants from Pakistan and India to England. These growing migration rates aggravate the problem and the building of mosques and prayer halls in Europe is constantly on the rise. In London alone, the number of mosques has reached about 800. And here we come to another problem: how can religion be taught to Turkish students in Germany, to Africans in France, to Indians and Pakistanis in England? The teacher must be sufficiently knowledgeable in Islamic culture and history, in addition to explaining their cultural heritage to the young so they can emotionally relate to their countries of origin, as well as the importance of explaining issues such as the lawful method of slaughtering animals, and so on.

The community of Black Muslims in America is one of the most active and well organized Muslim communities. These groups' aim is to first and foremost strike a balance with Islam in its early days. It is truly interesting how these communities have been more successful in solving social and behavioral problems than local authorities. In cities such as Washington and Houston, these communities have managed to solve problems such as drug addiction among prisoners. They speak little of Sufism and asceticism, but adopt instead a discourse based on explaining the contents of the Quran and clarifying the provisions of the Sharia. At the other end of the spectrum you find the activity of Sufi leagues. In recent years, these leagues have been very active and successful in attracting people wishing to embrace Islam, both in the United States and in Europe. Some of the successful Sufi leagues include the Darkaouiyya Tariqa which originated in North Africa (Morocco) as one of the off-shoots of the Chadhliyya Tariqa. This tariqa was successful in attracting large numbers of Europeans and Americans into its ranks. We also noted an increase in the establishment of convention centers along the lines of the Khanqah attributed to Nimatullah al-Farisi, both in Europe or in America. Some of these centers have publishing and printing activities, taking it upon themselves to explain Sufism in order to attract more followers and members.

It is also no secret that many Muslims study in American universities, but problems such as the relationship between Muslim minorities and the majority of the population always emerge. Thus, some believe that the increasing number of Muslims may help solve these problems as if Islam was promoting unbridled reproduction⁽¹⁰⁾. The Islamic world is going through new phases, and it is impossible to predict the future role that it will play at the global level. And here we quote –as is the habit of reform advocates– the divine verse: ***[For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession before and behind him: they guard him by command of Allah. Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). But when (once) Allah willeth a people's punishment there can be no turning it back nor will they find besides Him any to protect.]***⁽¹¹⁾.

Our desire is for more reformists in Islam such as Muhammad Iqbal. They are the spearheads of revival. How does Allah change Man? We see it when a person trusts in the judgment of God as we understand from the Holy Quran, and Man's actions converge with divine will. Man is forever ready to accept what his mind cannot grasp in divine judgment, true to Allah's words: ***[Allah is He other than whom there is no other god the sovereign the Holy One the Source of Peace (and Perfection). The Guardian of Faith the Preserver of Safety the Exalted in Might the Irresistible the Supreme: Glory to Allah! (high is He) above the partners they attribute to Him. He is Allah the Creator the Evolver the Bestower of Forms (or colors). To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: Whatever is in the heavens and on earth doth declare His Praises and Glory: and He is the exalted in Might the Wise.]***⁽¹²⁾.

Of all religions, Islam is the one religion that engaged in a lengthy debate with Christianity and was often the target of attacks, all of which arose from the lack of a proper understanding of Islam. The myth of the Muslim threat to

(10) Islam instituted many measures for birth control, including setting the period for pregnancy and breastfeeding at more than thirty months. It also enforced upon the head of the family to ensure that his offspring are well provided for after his death. This automatically regulated birth and is one of the most important control tools.

(11) Raa'd, verse 11.

(12) Al-Hashr, verse 23-24.

the Western European world saw light almost a thousand years ago. Behind this myth was the arrival of Muslim Arabs in Spain in the 8th century AD and then the Turks' siege of the walls of Vienna in 1683. These events spawned many misperceptions about Islam and Muslims as the traditional enemy of Christianity in Europe. Since Islam is the only universal religion revealed after Christianity, the Byzantine dialecticians often considered it a heresy that sprang from Christianity from the beginning and until the era of Adolf Harnack (1851-1930).

European misconceptions about Islam and Muhammad (PBUH) in the Middle Ages betray such false accusations. The denigration campaigns waged to demonize Islam in European minds continued, giving birth to more misconceptions such as the wild belief that Muslims worship Muhammad (PBUH) and that the Muslim addresses a mental representation of his statue before praying. These misconceptions about continued to appear in European poetry until the Age of Romance. As for the European belief that Islam is an iconoclast religion and rejects the sanctification of images, and that these prohibitions are attributed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a human being and not as a prophet, it is simply an expression of the Europeans' ignorance of the Arabic language. Europe first began to take interest in Arabic as the language of Islam in late medieval times. Since then, Christian monks began to study Arabic as a foreign language and understood it when Spain was under Muslim rule. In 1143, Robertus Ketenensis completed the first Latin translation of the meanings of the Quran. This translation was printed 400 years later by Bibliander (Basel, Switzerland). This Latin translation served as a basis for three other translations: the Italian translation and the German translation in 1616 by Salomon Schweiger, and finally the Dutch translation. Since then, Europeans have taken a keen interest in Arabic, sometimes with no proselytization goals on their agendas.

Despite the improvement of Europe's knowledge of the history of Arabs and Arabic, a number of controversial anti-Islam writings appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, influenced by the growing European fear of Turkish regional expansion, not to mention the popularity of that type of literature in those days due to their pleasant rhymed style. This was followed by a phase during which a new European formulation of Islam emerged. For the first time, Henri de Boulainvilliers described the Messenger (PBUH) as

the proponent of a rationally acceptable religion. This phase was marked by an inclination to reason and an acceptance of Islam. This encouraged Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) to say that if those who blame the religion of the Turks were to read the Quran a little, they would find it to be true and understandable. The opinion that prevailed in the eighteenth century was objective, unlike the previous biased one, thanks to the impact of the English translation of the meanings of the Quran completed by George Sale in 1734. Johan von Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) benefited from the German translation of the meanings of the Holy Qur'an which was completed by David Friedrich Megerlins in 1772. A year later, the translation of Friedrich Eberhar Boysens was published. Johann Jacob Ryske wrote about the martyrs of Arab literature and introduced Islamic history into the structure of world history.

It is thus safe to say that the classical phase, characterized by the West's debate with Islam, indeed came to an end in the time of Goethe and his book **The West-Eastern Divan**⁽¹³⁾ which described the world of Islam in its Persian, Arab and Islamic representations. Goethe concludes with the end of an era where the criticisms of Christian theology and politics against the Islamic East escalated in a glaring challenge, explaining the impact of the Islamic civilization on the West's flourishing cultures, though one can clearly recognize features of Islamic influence in literature and music in medieval Spain. The Muslims' natural sciences enriched Europe with priceless scientific contributions. Arab influences can be clearly perceived in the literary writings of the Romantic period and in medieval poetry. The Crusades brought many beautiful oriental goods to the West, as well as a large number of words that became part of European usage, such as Damask (meaning silk), the word Baldachin (meaning canopy), and other words of Arabic origin. European travel chroniclers used to send their reports on the opulence and wealth of Muslim lands during their travels within the Ottoman Empire, Iran and India.

(13) *The West-Östlicher Divan* is a collection of poems inspired by the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe from the works of the Persian poet Hafez al-Shirazi. Goethe wrote his Divan between 1814 and 1819. It was published for the first time in 1819 and was the last of his poetry works. It was also translated into Arabic by Dr Abdel Rahman Badawi and was published by the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing in Beirut in 1980. (*Islam Today*).

This was the case with the expedition of the Schleswig Holstein duchy in northeastern Germany. The embassy set out for Iran in 1639, following which Persian literature works became known in Germany. Paul Fleming wrote that they had brought Persia to the duchy of Holstein. Despite the sentiments of hostility before the terrifying Turkish tragedies, expressed by Daniel Kasper, Westerners did not see the East as hostile territories only but also as a land of wonders where the One Thousand and One Nights saw light, stories that were first translated into French in the early eighteenth century and later became a source of inspiration for European musicians and painters.

By the end of the eighteenth century, some classical Eastern literary works had become well known in Europe. Thanks to the German translations of Joseph Von Hammer Purgstalls (1774-1856), a large number of Arabic, Persian and Turkish works became known to the Germans. Prominent among these was the full translation of the compilation of poems of Hafez Al-Shirazi in 1812-1813. These poems became a source of inspiration for Goethe when he created *The West Eastern Divan*. Friedrich Ruckert (1788-1866) was a godsend for the German language at least, as he carried the dual hat of a classical orientalist and a poet and thus translated into German many treasures of Arab, Persian and Indian heritage. After Ruckert's time, an era of divergence began about the assimilation of foreign literature and the true methods of scientific research. The 19th century can be considered as the true beginning of Orientalism and Islamic studies. Gotthold Weil (1808-1889) tried in 1843 to present the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after excluding the latter accounts. William Muir (1819-1905), Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893) and D.S. Margoliouth (1858-1940) displayed a strong inclination towards vilifying the character of the Prophet (PBUH), and described him at the very best as a social reformer and not as the prophet of Islam or Allah's Messenger. After Ignaz Goldzieher embarked on his masterpiece in the study of hadith sciences and the discerning identification of sources as a development within the Islamic framework, this heralded new possibilities for understanding Islamic heritage with integrity and objectivity. The studies of Goldzieher and Christian Snouck-Hurgronjes contributed to the introduction of Islamic studies at European universities and, sifting through the different narration traditions and conflicting research views, attempted to put together a portrait of the Prophet Muhammad and of the call of Islam. Carl Heinrich Becker

said that we know much about the life of Prophet Muhammad to prevent us from idealizing him, but our knowledge about his environment is too little to properly understand him. The views of 19th century orientalists are repeatedly criticized in modern studies. Special mention can be made of Edward Said's writings, as well as many Middle Eastern, British and French researchers. Edward Said saw orientalism as serving the interests of imperialism and colonialism. In recent years, many studies and works appeared in which the researchers and authors displayed great sympathy towards Islam, especially towards Islamic mysticism. The Vatican's sympathy towards Islam further encouraged this development. Yet, we must not overlook the importance of studying early Islamic history on different critical bases, as Patricia Crones did in her 1977 book on Islam *Hagarism*. Our study in this book is based on the common views prevalent in heritage on Islamic history.

What Perspective for Contemplating Africa's Future?

Dr. Mohammed Kettani*

Today's theme (Africa as the broad horizon of our reflections) is presented in the light of the challenges facing this continent and the aspirations of its peoples to a promising future of progress and creativity. This issue is a highly topical one and preoccupies many African intellectuals, politicians and others. The words of His Majesty the King of Morocco, delivered at the Paris Forum (COP21) about the climate, are still resonating in minds⁽¹⁾: *"The African continent deserves special attention. The whole of Africa is experiencing an awakening. Africa is discovering itself and is gaining confidence. It is therefore in Africa – the continent of the future – that the planet's future will be decided."*

The first question that springs to mind on this subject is: Can Africa be seen as a single entity founded on an identity common to all African peoples? The answer is clear: ethnic, linguistic and religious pluralism will not allow this. What is more, the natural geography of the continent holds a clear answer to this question. Caution is therefore to be exercised before we issue random presumptions on the continent as a whole, reducing all African countries to a uniform mass and a melting pot. It is necessary to start by defining what «Africa» stands for. In the studies of 'Africanists', European researchers specializing in Africa, they often depict Africa as a continent divided by the Sahara into two different segments. These are the North African bloc that they call the Arab Muslim Africa, and Black Africa which lies south of the

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(1) *As-Sahraa al-Maghribiyya*, 1 December 2015 issue. The forum was held under UN auspices on 30 November 2015.

Sahara. This division is far from innocent of the imprint of a racist colonial ideology that sought to cleave the continent into two parts, justifying this by the constraints of natural geography, and to reserve a different treatment for each of them.⁽²⁾

Yet, and beyond the bias behind this division, historical reality confirms the distinction between the different parts of the continent, each having its own history. There is the front of North African countries and then that of sub-Saharan ones. The first lot, bordering the Mediterranean and turning its face to southern Europe, have remained present in ancient and middle history with their own character, civilization and culture. The other countries, by virtue of their isolation south of the Sahara, remained unknown until they were discovered by Europeans in the 16th century and onwards. There is also of the Horn of Africa which served as a bridge between the African and Asian continents and followed its own historical and civilizational trajectory. Thus, thinking of Africa as a single continental entity is justified by neither cultural nor civilizational reality, let alone the social and political one. However, the current historical juncture has brought about the interaction and convergence of the continent's north, south and center, thus signaling the emergence of a new world called Emerging Africa.

The great Sahara, which in the eyes of the «Africanists» was a desert expanse dividing the north and south of the continent, was in fact, as confirmed by history, a bridge between North and South. Interactions between the countries north and south of the Sahara and the exchange of influences among their peoples were never interrupted throughout the Middle Ages. Morocco, for example, played a role in such integration until European colonization which created barriers between them, fuelling racist tendencies and ethnic pluralism. Colonialism sought to establish dividing and artificial boundaries between tribes and regions. And by the time African peoples achieved their freedom from European domination, ethnic diversity and national pluralism had acquired new dimensions, reflecting these African peoples' desire to resuscitate their own specificity and raise awareness of their national

(2) Dr Ali Shalash: *Al-Adab al-Ifriqi*, page 12 and onwards. Silsilat 'Alam al-Ma'rifa, Vol. 171, Kuwait, March 1993.

identities. A distinction must be drawn here between identity pluralism which is a natural phenomenon that manifests itself through language, creed and social origins, and the «Balkanization» that European colonialism imposed on the continent since its occupation. The European states that divided Africa among themselves since the Berlin Conference in 1885 proceeded to fragment the entity of each of their colonies by subjecting them to tribal and racism division. The political divisions of the continent were the work of European governments and not of the African peoples. The land was divided with no regard for those who inhabited it, and sometimes the same tribe was divided between two states, even merging one part with its traditional enemies.⁽³⁾

This colonial fragmentation took the shape of political borders that had negative impacts on African countries after their independence. It is no wonder then that post-independence Africa is divided into more than fifty states, that over the last 40 years, more than 30 armed conflicts broke out around the issue of borders, secession and unity, and that the casualties of wars arising from this have reached more than seven million Africans. This means that many of Africa's states were preoccupied with civil wars after independence at the expense of economic development, so much so that some writers with an interest in African affairs named Africa the continent of political perversion.⁽⁴⁾

The fragmented reality of the continent was the first challenge facing African States once they obtained their independence. In fact, their political balkanization into several states was intended to serve the interests of the colonizer after his departure. As a consequence, the perspective of African unity was a necessity for most of those who had led the struggle for independence. It was only natural that after the post-liberation wars, awareness would rise about the need for unity and the unity of the African personality, or in other words, awareness of pan-Africanism as an umbrella

(3) *Tarikh al-Bashariyya: Atattawur al-'Ilmi wal Thaqafi*, vol 2, page 62, al-Haya al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil Kitab, Cairo, 1972.

(4) Dr Jamal Hamdane: *Ifriquia al-Jadeeda: Dirsaa fil al-Jurgharfia al-Siyasiyya*, page 61 and onwards. Al-Nahda al-Masriyya, 1966.

under which all Africans would unite. This dictated an awareness of solidarity and unity among African peoples in the aftermath of their liberation. This awareness was reflected in the ideas advocated by African leaders who had studied at European universities, learning about political and intellectual ideologies, nationalist movements and political systems. They developed a common vision of how to fulfill African Unity after the founding of their national states, the institutionalization of their systems on modern bases and the introduction of modern democratic systems. The question is: on what basis did it occur? The prospect of unity had many options to choose from. One was to take shape on the basis of a democratization of society first and adopting Western systems after renouncing the rigid tribal traditions and superstitious beliefs that hindered freedom of thought and action, which meant fully embracing modernity. The other option was to merge this modernity with African authenticity in order to preserve the hard core of the African identity. One other option was to focus on human development, the eradication of poverty and vulnerability and improving social conditions. In all these scenarios, the rising of the sun of unity over Africa was the common aspiration of all Africans seeking to put an end to the dark night of the colonial era.

It should be recalled that the concept of «African Unity», which had prevailed over the last three decades of the previous century, had remained a vague one, infused with a load of fervor and impulse, and thus lost its political significance and substantive value. For some, African unity meant simply close cooperation among the continent's states at the international level. Others understood it to mean the creation of a regional organization as a mechanism of coordinated cooperation, such as the one developed by the OAU which was founded in Addis Ababa in 1963. Others considered that African unity meant the establishment of some form of federation of African states, without this causing the dissolution of any country's sovereignty into that of another. Lastly, some believed in the possibility of an African federative union aimed at the establishment of a United States of Africa⁽⁵⁾ resembling the model of the United States of America.

(5) Dr Jamal Hamdane: *Ifriqia al-Jadeeda: Dirsaa fil al-Jurgharfa al-Siyasiyya*, pp. 360-361.

Indeed, the idea of African unity which molded the first vision of its future did not mean more than achieving a unified front of its peoples around the continent's crucial issues, embodying a cooperation conducive to the development of its countries, showing solidarity with each of these countries as to their territorial integrity, and fighting the separatist movements that threaten to jeopardize their security and stability.

Decades after independence, the constraints of reality revealed that this unity was closer to a utopian vision and the farthest possible from concretization. Extreme morphological disparities in the continent's natural geography, ethnic and tribal pluralism, linguistic and religious diversity, ideological conflicts between rightists and leftists as well as international tugs of war, all of these constituted a daunting impediment to the unification of the continent which ultimately had nothing of unity save sentiments. The common denominator between most of its peoples was not national history, language or religion, but the tragic colonial past that gave birth to a sense of unity among Africans before racial discrimination and the divide of color. This drove all Africans to show solidarity and to close ranks before a common enemy who used the principle of «divide» as the core of his policy. Sub-Saharan African countries provided a fertile ground for nurturing such sentiments.

There is no stronger evidence of the failure of the notion of unity in its idealist form than the evolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) since its inception in 1963. The challenges and crises were further compounded by structural obstacles that ate away at the continent's security and stability. At the forefront of these challenges were the problems of environmental degradation, namely pollution and desertification, epidemics and famine, escalating forced migration, as well as the emergence of extremist groups and the trafficking of drugs, weapons and human beings. Over the last 30 years, tribal conflicts and coups d'état have been following closely on each other's heels.⁽⁶⁾

(6) At least 50 African tribes were in conflict with each other and military coups took place in at least thirty countries. See *Al-Mawssu'a At-Tarikhyya al-Jughrafia by Massoud Al-Khawand*, vol 2, p. 212 and beyond. Al-Sharika al-'Alamiyya lil Mawsu'aat, Beirut, 2005. Al-Mawssu'a is a twenty-volume encyclopedia published between 1994-2005.

These events and conditions projected the disastrous condition of sub-Saharan African reality where the political is inseparable from the economic and the social. A report of «*Le Monde Diplomatique*», published in May 1993, stated that Africa had seemed in the previous century to sit outside the global economic system which was characterized by intensive exchanges between Western Europe, North America, and Asia-Pacific. It was imperative that a choice be made between two approaches, one of development and the other of democracy as a way out of underdevelopment. In the context of this new development of which the contours were gradually becoming defined, a shift occurred among political role-players from a political perspective of unification to an integrated economic vision. This vision was exploring the creation of regional unions on the basis of the economic complementarity of their countries, a security concern and geopolitical affinities. This integration was geared at the establishment of an institutional framework for the regulation of economic ties between a number of sovereign states sharing physical features, with a view to mobilizing their development efforts, improving the lives of their peoples and enhancing their productive and competitive capacities within the international system.

The perspective of economic integration took center stage after that prospect of integrative unity was deferred. It is in fact economic integration that will enable the countries engaged in it to improve the social and economic conditions of their peoples. It can also give birth to a middle class capable of bringing about the desired democratic changes. Yet, the controversy continues unabated about the best way to achieve this economic integration. Some believe that it must begin with an African union⁽⁷⁾ that stimulates integration and provides the tools to face neoliberal and globalized capitalism policies. Others believe that integration must begin with the creation of federations or organizations that would enable the states involved to strengthen their economies, improve their production, expand their markets and create networks of regular communication among them.⁽⁸⁾ This is the opinion of the

(7) This is the opinion of the Tanzanian Issa Shiviji. Cf. *As-Siyassa al-Dawliyya* magazine, Cairo, special on strategic shifts and the crisis of complementarity, issue 201, July 2015.

(8) This is the opinion of the Ugandan thinker Yash Tandon.

Nigerian politician Adedeji Adebayo, architect of economic regional groupings in Africa⁽⁹⁾. He developed his perspective on economic integration around the principles of self-reliance, sustainable development, operationalization of a participatory democracy, striving for justice in the distribution of development income, interdependence from within the regional union and not externally since dependency on other countries, European ones, will only worsen the dependency of African countries on the world's major powers.

The idea of African unity evolved into an African union. Then it gave birth to regional federations or organizations based on the division of the continent into economic zones, to promote trade and attract investment and international aid to each region, improve intraregional trade, and establish a common market or free trade areas. This trend evolved strongly during the 1970s and 1980s through many organizations such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Organization of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA). At the 1991 African summit in Abuja, Niger, the Conference set a definite schedule for the creation of the African Economic Union by 2027. This would entail the unification of currencies, the elimination of tariffs and the promotion of the free movement of people, goods and services. At the turn of the millennium, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was established with the aim of concretizing the development strategy with the blessing of the World Bank, in order to strengthen Africa's presence in the global economy.

The sustainable development perspective has always been an absolute priority in the advancement of Africa. In this context, His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco declared that the real battle for the advancement of Africa must aim to combat poverty, eradicate illiteracy, generalize schooling, education and vocational training, ensure food security, adequate housing, health, a sound environment, and access to modern technology and its developments.⁽¹⁰⁾

(9) Adedji served as a minister in his country on 1975 and was also a member of the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa.

(10) Speech of His Majesty King Mohamed VI at the European Summit in Cairo on 3 April 2000, quoted in *Inbi'athu Ummah*, page 261. Al-Matba'a al-Malakiyya, Rabat, 2000.

An expert on African affairs described what could be called a shortcut to Africa's development, defining the foundation of this shortcut on development as the real gateway to abolishing backwardness. Such development must be based on a realistic knowledge of social conditions, nature and effective mechanisms. The priorities of such development must also be organized. This said, the most daunting challenge to any development strategy remains the availability of human competencies, technical expertise and the collective mobilization that springs at the grassroots level of its beneficiaries, rather than a mobilization imposed from above. It is here that development meets culture.

The relationship of culture with politics and economy is in our view the relationship of ideas to collective and individual behavior and attitudes. There can be no policy in the absence of unity in ideas and national orientations. No branches can grow on a tree without their nurturing roots. It is a gross error to ignore the role of ideas and of culture in bringing about cohesion among the individuals and groups who make up one people or one nation. The danger may be greater if we ignore the intellectual and religious void that is exploited by isolationist ideas and introverted cultures, feeding on extremism and ending up by imposing itself through terrorism, violence and the spread of enmity. For the renaissance of the African people, it is imperative to spread an effective culture based on such premises as freedom from dependence, self-confidence, openness, tolerance and ever-renewing creativity.

This is how we come to the third perspective we have in mind when thinking about the future of Africa, and that is the cultural perspective. It is a most complex vision since culture remains the key motive animating people facing the making of their own destiny. While we do not dispute the plurality of African culture, not only with regard to the Arab and Islamic culture north of the continent, but also the greater diversity of the peoples in the South, we believe that it is necessary to think of a continental African culture that embraces the common values of all the cultures in our continent. This means that the cultural specificity of each African country should not be a stumbling block to the achievement of a paradigm shift from a stagnant, closed and rigid level of civilization to an advanced, open and dynamic level. In this context, positive interaction with globalization and seizing the development

opportunities that arise from this globalization for our African peoples has become a sine qua non condition.

In reality, Africa has made strides in cross-pollination with Western cultures and blending with their civilization. The fact that African peoples often rely on universal languages for their education, information and communication and in their international interactions proves that this is an unavoidable choice. Yet, it carries many risks and cannot occur without a conflict between self-identity assertion and unconditional integration, that is, between specificity and universality. That is the delicate manoeuvre all African countries are grappling with.

A UNESCO report⁽¹¹⁾ stated that throughout the African continent, the movements of Africans have either adopted what is new or chose to return to the old, or a combination of these two. In the years following the Second World War, the report adds, some adjustment was brought to this division. An elite of African intellectuals emerged and rejected the trend of integration with the European culture, leaning instead towards a revival of African culture and the glorification of the Negroid culture. They wanted to reinterpret Africa's history from the viewpoint of the African People.⁽¹²⁾

Influenced by the struggle between colonization and Africans, a common spirit emerged and permeated the continent as a whole after the regression of the rightist and leftist ideologies. It began to raise awareness about the African personality and the future of Africa's peoples in a context of dignity and self-esteem. And while African regional federations are a mechanism for achieving greater integration and complementarity as a prelude to integrating the global economic system, the economic incentives are not sufficient for the establishment of such unions, unless they have as a springboard a culture that sharpens the African peoples' sense of their own entity and of their capacity to bring about a new reality. This culture relates to the qualifications acquired through schooling, education and training to embark on the world

(11) *History of Humanity*, UNESCO, vol. 2, UNESCO, page 71. Al-Hayaa al-Masriyya al-'Amma lil Kitab, Cairo, 1972.

(12) Ibid, page 72.

of knowledge and integrate the age of science, and acquire the ability to compete in a productive and creative world and to open up to universal values. The African continent is known for its multiple cultures, each with its own specificities, but the values of all these cultures must be brought into play in order to serve the ambitious project of the renaissance and unity of African peoples.

I would like to emphasize that imagining the future of Africa should be based on the complementarity of these three visions, the political, the economic and the cultural, because each can only be achieved with the support of the other. If sustainable development is the project aiming for the renaissance of Africa, this development must be based on a self-sustaining African cultural system in which all the shareholders and partners are actively engaged, motivated by collective conviction and a sense of mobilization.

The cultural system is not capable of bringing any society into action, or motivating it towards partnership unless it is a rational, evolved, renewing culture that is open to historical evolutions and to the facts of science. This means that African development must acquire the impetus to be self-driven from within the societies concerned with human development. This can only be done by overcoming the imagined incompatibility between specificity and universality, i.e. the specificity of African identities on the one hand, and the universality of contemporary human values, on the other. I believe that this is an imaginary contradiction between the two since we are able to preserve our identities while opening up to those universal values. Overcoming this obstacle which has been the subject of much debate is the gateway to the edification of our African continent without a complex of inferiority. The African continent can only be built by the hands of its own children.

Concept of Renewal and its Dimensions in the Islamic Perspective

Dr Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq*

1. Renewal is a law of nature:

Life is in a movement of perpetual renewal. Human life, in particular, bows to this general law on the one hand, but is on the other hand governed by the will and reasoning of Man. This means that the human being is not a feather flying where the wind may take it, or a mere recipient of influences from his surroundings. On the contrary, he has an impact on events, steers their course and plays a highly positive role in the movement of life. He is entrusted with responsibility and is never harnessed to serve others.

A quick look at the march of life reveals the extent of Man's ability to steer the course of history and the limitless changes he effected in all the walks of life. In modern times, Man has brought to fulfillment tremendous revolutions in science, technology, information and communication, succeeding lately in discovering the human genomic map, a discovery that scientists expect to help cure many hereditary diseases. Through genetic engineering research, Man has managed to make alterations in flora and fauna, achieve animal cloning, and is in the process of applying the same to the human breed as well. It seems that development in these areas will not stop any time soon.

If such is the case – and it is indeed-, the future of humankind is in the hands of Man. This does not mean the belittling of divine power, but is part of the ability that Man was originally intended to have in order to be a creature of free will, with the choice to engage in actions or refrain from them, as Allah decreed in the divine law: [***Verily never will Allah change the condition of a***

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people until they change it themselves (with their own souls)]⁽¹⁾ .

Divine will attributed the choice and will to change to mankind first. Man has to initiate this change which, in this case obviously means renewal for the better, after which divine intervention occurs to help the human being fulfill his mission by bringing about the conditions conducive to the achievement of these goals.

Since the motion of life is perpetual, it is in a process of never ending renewal. Even the cells of the human body are constantly being replenished except for brain cells. And who knows? In the future, humans may also find a way to regenerate brain cells. Renewal is therefore a law of nature, and the alternative to renewal is stagnation and death.

2. Islam and renewal

As a religion, Islam is inherently in keeping with the laws of nature and does not run counter to the human instinctive nature. Islam encourages continuous renewal in the movement of life and society in order to attain the best in all spheres of life.

The call for renewal was clear and candid in the hadith of Allah's Messenger: *"At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this ummah someone who will renew its religious understanding."*⁽²⁾

According to hadith interpreters, the renewal of religious understanding means reviving the Sunnah and abolishing heresy or, as al-'Alqami says: *"The meaning of renewal is reviving what has been studied in the Book and Sunnah and applying them in deeds."*⁽³⁾

It may seem that this old understanding of renewal does not bring anything new or provide a new take on meaning of this concept, but we can see in the old definition, as contained in the Prophet's hadith, that it is true renewal,

(1) *Ar-Ra'd*, verse 11.

(2) Narrated by Abu Daoud in the *Sunan* and by others. Faydh al-Qadiru Sharhu Al-Jami' Al-Shaghir by Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munaoui, vol. 2, page 281, Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut, 1972.

(3) Abd al-Ra'uf Al-Munaoui: *Faydh al-Qadir*, vol. 2, page 281 and beyond.

for it entails on the one hand, to exposing the poor understanding of religion –which isolates it from life-, and clearing the mirror of religion, removing all the impurities that have adhered to it by way of habits or traditions that are foreign to the essence of religion.

All of this would restore religion to its former serenity and purity and would create an opportunity to engage in a proper reading of the Quran, far from the interpretations of those who claim to be protective of religion when they are undermining it, wittingly or unwittingly. One then becomes aware that religion is not as it is portrayed by the introverts, a mere set of rites and rituals, but a religion that encompasses faith, Charia, morals and civilization, promotes science and knowledge, and opens the door wide open before all scientific and human progress, all of which entailing some degree or the other of renewal.

Some may consider that such an understanding could not have crossed the minds of our forefathers. And here we have the right to wonder: if this understanding did not cross the minds of our salaf, how did Muslims, a relatively short period of time after the advent of Islam, manage to build a towering civilization that is one of the longest-living civilizations in history, with cultural contributions to all humanity, and a profound impact in human history in general? Was that not a result of a correct understanding of religion and the renewal it advocates?

Regardless of intentions, we should look at the bright and positive aspects of our heritage that promote progress and advancement in all spheres of life. The understanding to which we have referred does indeed help in this regard, in addition to not being entirely disconnected from the modern understanding of renewal. Modern-day renewal means sustaining the vitality of Islam, its validity for all time and space, its compatibility with continued progress, freeing it from the barriers erected by ignorant friends who conceal its light and radiance from eyes and hearts.⁽⁴⁾

Since Islam and its teachings are considered a religion of life in all its dimensions, the renewal intended in the hadith is also a renewal of life in all

(4) Sheikh Amine al-Khawli: *al-Mujaddidum fil Islam*, page 32. Al-Hayaa al-Misriyya al-'Ammah lil Kitab, Cairo, 2000.

its different aspects. Throughout the history of Islam, Muslim scholars and intellectuals have endeavored to revitalize and promote life through science and knowledge. Scientific advancement, knowledge, human experience and the lessons learned from history, when all of this converges in an individual or a group, it provides them with the necessary prerequisites to engage in this renewal. Renewal does not arise out of the void, does not seek the lazy or the introverted, nor does it tumble out of the sky by miracle. It is an action undertaken by the person advancing ahead of his people on the road and seeing what they still cannot see, those who set out on the path, ride upfront, scout the way ahead, those are the pioneers of every nation and the champions of renewal.

The history of Islamic thought has seen many of these pioneers who enriched Islamic life and thought with their judicious visions and rational ideas. There are also many old and modern writings addressing the notion of renewal and its advocates, speaking long of the extensive and continuous efforts made by the proponents of renewal in Islam. Some of these writings attempted to list these advocates in the past centuries and the scholarly efforts they undertook in their drive to protect religion and correct Islamic thought on the one hand, and to remove the obstacles hindering the march of this thought, on the other, by clearing the blemishes and corruptions that have obscured correct vision and understanding of religion.⁽⁵⁾

The vigilance and attention of Muslim thinkers was clear at all times, propelled by their extreme protectiveness of Islam and its precepts and of the purity and serenity of Islamic thought. One of these scholars was Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali of whom one of the books carries a title that reveals his renewal and revival trend, namely *'Ulum Ihya Ad-Dine* or *The Revival of Religious Sciences*.

There is also a long list of modern renewal scholars such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Mohamed Abdu, Mohamed Rachid Reda, Sheikh Mohammed

(5) Sheikh Abdul-Muta'al al-Se'eedi: *Al-Mujaddidum fi al-Islam*. Maktabat al-Adaab (library and printing house), Cairo, undated. See also: *Al-Mujaddidum fi al-Islam* by Sheikh Amine al-Khawli. The last book was based by its author on two older books: *Al-Tanbiatu 'ala ma yab'atuhu Allah 'ala ras al Miaa* by al-Suyuti (died in 911 AH), and *Boghiat al-Muqtadin wa Minhata al-Mujiddin 'ala Tohfata al-Muhdathin* by Abdelrahim al-Maraghi al-Gergaoui (died in 1825).

Mustafa al-Maraghi, Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltut, Mohammed Iqbal, Malik Ibn Nabi, Zaki Najib Mahmoud⁽⁶⁾ and many others. Each had his own approach to renewal and to reform but they all shared one objective and that was the concern that religion must be understood as a religion of life in all its dimensions and that it cannot be isolated from life. Religion is knowledge, civilization, morals and culture in addition to being a faith and a Charia.

3. Manifestations of renewal in Islamic thought

As defined in the Philosophical Dictionary of *Majma al-Lugha al-Arabiyya*, renewal is a trend adopting new ways in intellectual and scientific life. Some of the forms of this renewal could be extreme.⁽⁷⁾ The renewal of Islamic thought entails resorting also to new methods and approaches in intellectual and scientific life, but does not follow the same path as what is called radical renewal. This form of renewal is alien to Islam and has in fact plagued it in the past and the present. The trademark of renewal in Islamic thought is moderation, the middle stance, balance and harmony with human instinct.

Renewal in Islamic thought takes different forms. It may be an all-encompassing revival of all spheres of life when deterioration affects all these spheres. It may be directed at one aspect that has fallen prey to lethargy and imbalance to prevent the spread of this condition to the remaining aspects. It could also be a gradual renewal or a radical one. Each of these forms has its particular circumstances and prerequisites.

We note that some modern renewal advocates propose renewal in the religious sphere. Others are in favor of renewal in the scientific, social, political or military fields, each according to the circumstances and requirements of the era in which the renewal advocate lives and the priorities he deems obvious.

However, past experience has shown that engaging in partial revival does not bear the desired fruits. True renewal should be based on an integrated civilizational project, rooted in full conviction of the necessity of renewal and

(6) When perusing his writings towards the end of his life.

(7) *Al-Mu'jam al-falsafi*, *Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya*, Cairo, 1979.

change at the physical and moral levels, in order to advance society and fulfill the objectives of inclusive civilizational progress.

This requires the creation of an intellectual environment that is receptive to constructive reform. This goes through reforming minds and freeing thought from superstitions and illusions, to attain the right level of maturity and awareness of the need for renewal and ensuring its success. Sheikh Muhammad Abdu, for example, was a religious and social reformer and a prominent figure of political thought. But in the matters of reform or renewal in these areas, he preferred to start by creating a favorable climate and finding the fertile soil to sow the seeds of reform in all fields, by freeing thought from of the shackles of tradition, and reforming the Arabic language as the vessel and medium of thought. He says in this regard:

"I have raised my voice high on two matters of momentous import: the first is to free thought from the shackles of tradition. The second is to reform the methods of teaching the Arabic language."⁽⁸⁾

In the past and at present, renewal in Islamic thought has witnessed the emergence of several currents with objectives and approaches that differ depending on the visions of their leaders. Some may fall under the concept of revival proper, others may approach or depart from this concept in one way or another, and some represent a real impediment to some form of revival or reform.

We would like to refer here to two completely contradictory images, although they come to agreement in their final outcome. Some understand revival or reform to mean a return to everything from the past and the rejection of anything new or novel as an unacceptable heresy. They consider this as religious reform, quoting in this regard the *hadith*: "*Avoid novelties, for every novelty is an innovation, and every innovation is an error.*"⁽⁹⁾ They fail to distinguish in this regard between innovation in religion and the introduction of what is extraneous to it, making them part of it when they are an addition,

(8) Ahmed Amine: *Zu'amae al-Islah fil 'Asr al-Hadith*, pp 323-327, Dar al-Kitaba al-'Arabi, Beirut.

(9) Narrated by Abu Daoud, hadith No. 4507.

and the renewal intended in the Prophet's (PBUH) *hadith* which aims to reinvigorate this religion, a religion for life in all its dimensions.

At the opposite end there is another form of renewal that attempts to shun the past and everything that is old and to introduce new (reformatory) ideas, even if they are manifestly or implicitly contrary to the teachings of Islam. This trend is promoted by the advocates of trends that favor a complete cultural cleavage from the past.

These are not overly different from the first group as both are radical in their orientation and neither position serves Islam. The first group seeks to draw Islam to its own poor understanding and push it outside the motion of life. The second group wishes to make Islam a historical phase that obeyed to certain no longer existing conditions, and therefore building on it in contemporary life would be counterproductive.

Before we conclude about the forms of renewal in Islamic thought, we would like to emphasize once again the following points:

1. Any renewal thought that is characterized as Islamic must be linked to the fundamentals of Islam, and is to be carried out within the recognized tenets of this religion.
2. Renewing religion in the sense described earlier involves the renewal of all spheres of life with no exception, and religion cannot be construed as independent from life.
3. Renewal in religion in the sense of departing from the framework of Islamic constants, such as reducing the five prayers to three, making the performance of hajj possible any time of the year, making the woman's share in inheritance equal to that of man, and similar views proposed by some today and other similar opinions. This form of revival is the one to which applies the *hadith*: "*Whoever innovates in this Deen of ours what is not from it, will have it rejected.*"⁽¹⁰⁾ This would be considered as "radical renewal" in the sense referred to earlier and its advocates cannot attribute their renewal to Islam or Islamic thought.

(10) Narrated by al-Bukhari in his *Saheeh*. Hadith No. 2697.

4. A progressive renewal and attention to priorities

It is known that Islam brought about a complete transformation in the beliefs, customs and traditions that prevailed in the jahiliyya society when this religion first emerged. To bring about that change, Islam resorted to a pedagogical approach based on conditioning minds to accepting renewal and change, to ensure success and continuity. This entailed instilling conviction in the necessity of this renewal, and recognizing the benefit that it can bring to society.

This is easily observable in many Islamic teachings and legislative texts, even in the matter of faith and apostasy, although such matter cannot accept half solutions. Islam has always addressed Man's reason, showing people that what they worship besides Allah can neither bring benefit nor ward off harm.

It was only once faith took hold in hearts and minds were ready to accept renewal Islam that began to change society's conditions and the habits and customs people were familiar with but that were not in harmony with sound human nature and rigorous morals. Islam did not impose this suddenly and without preparation, but adopted a progressive approach that also took into account priorities.

This becomes clearer when we reflect on the many new pieces of legislation that Islam introduced. The most obvious example is the prohibition of alcohol. Islam resorted to touching the religious conscience and faith in the believers' hearts, first by drawing attention to the fact that alcohol had some a benefit but also harmful effects for people, with the caveat that its harmful effects were more numerous than its benefits.

This remark called for reflection and pondering on the part of the believers since it answered a question addressed to the Prophet (PBUH). The Holy Quran says: "***They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: "In them is great sin and some profit for men; but the sin is greater than the profit."***"⁽¹¹⁾. However, the answer did not address the issue of lawfulness or lack of it but limited itself to the above-mentioned clarification.

(11) Al-Baqara, verse 219.

The second step was to forbid believers from engaging in prayers when they were drunk and would not know what they were saying, appealing to their sense of faith as Allah said: **[O ye who believe! approach not prayers with a mind befogged until ye can understand all that ye say.]**⁽¹²⁾. Engaging in prayer is likely to give the praying person that feeling of standing before Allah, and that he has thus entered into a spiritual communion with the Almighty, addressing Him, beseeching Him and enjoining Him. The praying person must be conscious of this and be fully aware of what he is uttering and doing, otherwise there is no point in pursuing this communion. The state of inebriety and the absence of reason distract the worshipper from all of this.

The divine directive not to engage in prayer whilst drunk comprises an implicit prohibition of alcohol considering the short lapse of time separating the day's five prayers, without for that matter reaching an absolute ban. The Muslims began to move away of their own volition from alcohol after being convinced of this divine directive, and then came the third step which was the categorical prohibition of alcohol, spelt out in the verse: **[O ye who believe! intoxicants and gambling (dedication of) stones and (divination by) arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork: eschew such (abomination) that ye may prosper.]**⁽¹³⁾.

Muslims have not only committed themselves to respecting this prohibition, but their strong spiritual conviction made them staunch defenders of this principle. Islam followed this style in much of its legislation. This progressive approach did not project a sense of compromise with the corrupt traditions and customs of the time, but was a lesson to Muslims that tackling such matters required a keen eye that probes the characteristics and minute details of souls and their attachment to familiar habits and customs, this necessitating a wise and judicious approach. Is there anyone who truly knows what is good or harmful for the creation other than the Almighty who says: **[Should He not know He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries (and) is well-acquainted (with them).]**⁽¹⁴⁾.

(12) An-Nissaa, verse 43.

(13) Al-Maida, verse 90.

(14) Al-Mulk, verse 14.

There is in this gradual approach to reform a most profound lesson for all reformers and advocates of renewal who should be knowledgeable, understanding and aware of people's hearts, conscious of the didactic approaches that redress and guide these hearts onto the right path by creating self-motivation and propelling them from within to contribute to the desired change and hoped-for reform and the continuity of its success.

We can thus understand the lack of success of many attempts at change and renewal that resorted to oppression and coercion and there are many examples of this. We all know that in the former Soviet Union, communism made radical changes in society, which lasted in all oppression and coercion for 70 years, then ultimately failed miserably and became history. The Kemalism movement in Turkey has also made compulsory changes for 70 years or more. Resistance, or at least psychological resistance to these changes, continues even today.

One aspect that Islam took in serious consideration when bringing about changes in society was the need to distinguish between matters of substance and others of form.

Naturally, priority goes to the matters of substance while secondary matters take second stage. The renewal advocate must start by establishing a list of priorities. He must not concern himself with marginal issues as this may undermine his attention to essential matters and his attempts at reform would come to naught.

It would be absurd on the part of religious reformers to turn their attention to matters of form that have no effect on the lives of Muslims, matters such as the exaggerated interest in the length of beards and shortness of clothes and such habits that are of no relevance to the worship for Allah Almighty, disregarding at the same time major causes such as illiteracy, socio-economic underdevelopment and such issues.

It is regrettable in this regard that the Taliban movement in Afghanistan resorted in March 2001 to the demolition of the Buddha statues, as if this constituted a major and fate-changing step there. Naturally, this irked Buddhism followers around the world and demonstrations ensued in India where copies of the Quran were torn, burnt and trampled in retaliation against the demolition of the Buddhist statues. Muslims would gladly have done without all of this.

The Holy Quran warns us not to provoke those who worship other than Allah with insults of any type lest this gives them license to insult Allah: [***Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance.***]⁽¹⁵⁾.

There is an Islamic rule that says: “*Warding off evils takes precedence over attracting benefit*”. Why would Muslims unleash evil on themselves by their own hands? The demolition of the Buddhist statues has immensely tarnished the image of Islam and Muslims in the world, and did not bring those who carried out the demolition any religious or worldly benefit.

What is unfortunate is that whenever we take a step ahead in the march of progress, the elements of backwardness that claim affiliation to religion and trade in politics raise their ugly heads to drag us many notches down by fabricating absurd battles. The Ummah has therefore been faltering in its course and lagging behind while others are accelerating with the divide growing wide between us and them as we slid to the tail end, lamenting our bad luck and searching here and there for a scapegoat to blame for our inadequacy and failings.

Today, the critical issue facing the Islamic Ummah is one of underdevelopment in various intellectual, social, economic and scientific fields, and also in the areas of religious thought. Reason should play its full role in the salvation of the Ummah from the pit of backwardness, while tits preoccupation with marginal and absurd issues is a crime against this Ummah and an impediment to progress and to catching up with the march of time.⁽¹⁶⁾

The time has come for Muslims to awaken and turn their attention to reform at all levels, in particular the reform of minds and thinking modes. The calamity that has befallen Islam today is not its enemies because their enmity is unconcealed and their plotting unmasked. Islam’s misfortune is embodied by the ignorant among its followers who advance in the front rows and lead the Muslims into narrow alleys and dead ends that lead to the abyss, though the path of Islam is clear and anything but tortuous. It is the way of the righteous

(15) Al-An’am, 108.

(16) See the author’s book: *Ad-Dine wa al-Falsafa wa al-Tanwir*, page 116. Dar al-Ma’arif, Iqra series, Cairo.

as the Holy Quran says: [*Verily this is My Way leading straight: follow it: follow not (other) paths: they will scatter you about from His (great) path: thus doth He command you that ye may be righteous.*]⁽¹⁷⁾.

5. The mechanism of renewal in Islam

Islam has adopted a renewal mechanism (the principle jurisprudence or *ijtihad*) that covers all fields, including, of course, the religious one. Islam's affirmation of monotheism and that of the seal of prophecy signaled the end of the mind's unaccountability. Once the last of divine inspiration and prophecy were revealed, the mind was called upon to rely on itself in any aspect about which no definitive religious text has been revealed. The mind must trust in its abilities. The Quran's appeal to reason and to experimentation, its insistence on pondering and reflecting on the universe and exploring the older sources of human knowledge - all of these were different manifestations of the concept of the end of prophecy.

It was in that spirit that the principle of *ijtihad* became the most important practical step elected by Islam to help develop thought and advance it in order to ensure the continuity of progress and advancement in life. *Ijtihad* means relying on reasoning to infer legal rules, and it constituted the beginning of intellectual rationalizing for Muslims. *Ijtihad* evolved within the nurturing folds of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, and Islam's tolerance extended to opening the way to the mind and to reasoning in the area of legal provisions where no definitive texts exist. It allowed the mind to rely on its own resources and actually encouraged it to do so. Thus came into existence the Islamic rule that says: "*If one passes a judgment having exerted himself to arrive at what is correct, and he is indeed correct, he will have two rewards. If he passes judgment having exerted himself to arrive at what is correct, but it is incorrect, he will have one reward.*"⁽¹⁸⁾

The late Islamic thinker Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) described *ijtihad* as a principle of movement in Islam.⁽¹⁹⁾ This principle was established during the

(17) Al-An'am, verse 153.

(18) Narrated by al-Bukhari in his Saheeh – Kitab al-l'tissam.

(19) Dr Muhammad Iqbal: *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, translated by Abbas Mahmoud, pp. 144, 168, 170, Cairo, 1968.

life of the Prophet (PBUH) and with his consent, as apparent in the answer of Mu'adh Ibn Jabal when the Prophet (PBUH) decided to send him to Yemen and asked him: How would you rule if you were called on to judge on a matter? His answer was clear in that he would rule according to the Holy Book, if not then according to the Sunnah of His Messenger, and if not by relying on his mind, his reasoning and deductions.

The principle of *ijtihad* has had a great impact on enriching Islamic *fiqh* studies and finding quick solutions to issues that had no precedent during the early eras of Islam. *Ijtihad* gave birth to the four known doctrines of Islamic *fiqh* of which the teachings continue to guide the Islamic world today. *Ijtihad* has also led to the emergence of a new philosophical science, the science of *fiqh*, which is a philosophy of Islamic law. The first scholar to have invented this science was Imam al- Shafei in his book *Ar-Rissala* before Islamic thought was influenced by Greek philosophy.

Ijtihad also led to the adoption of the principle of public interest in Islamic jurisprudence. The concept of public interest is defined by scholars as serving the common good: anything that serves public interest and wards off harm thus leading to the wellbeing of the people is called an interest. The famous saying is common in Islamic jurisprudence: "*Where common good is found there is divine law.*"⁽²⁰⁾

Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH-1111 AD) used the concept of public interest in two senses: a narrow meaning that means attracting benefit and warding off harm, and a much broader sense that is the lofty purpose of Charia which is to preserve religion, lives, reason, wealth and offspring (or lineage). Anything that leads to the accomplishment of this lofty purpose is of public interest. Najm Eddine at-Toufi (1316) considered public interest as an independent source of legislation.⁽²¹⁾

Imam Mohammed Mustafa Al-Maraghi adopted this trend and defended it, telling the members of the committee that he formed to regulate personal

(20) This is attributed to Najm-Eddine Al-Toufi (died in 716) who considered that benefit was an independent source of legislation.

(21) *Moujaz Dairat al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyya*, volume 30, page 9364 and onwards, Sharjah, 1998.

status: *“Choose what you believe will be suitable for the time and place. I need not come up with a text of Islamic doctrine that echoes what you have introduced. The Islamic Charia is accommodating and broad enough for us to find in its branches and provisions in civil and criminal cases everything that would benefit us and serve us at all times. As long as they are not categorical, jurisprudential issues are subject to renewal and change.”*⁽²²⁾

There is no doubt that the Islamic Charia's flexibility and moderation have made it responsive to the interests of people at all times and in all places. It will always remain in constant renewal and keep abreast of cultural progress as long as there are renewal advocates who truly appreciate the importance of ijtiḥād which was endorsed by the Prophet (PBUH) and correctly understand his ḥadīth about the renewal of religion.

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that ijtiḥād is not limited to legal aspects but applies rightfully to all worldly matters, hence the words of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH): *“You know better the affairs of your world.”*⁽²³⁾ This means that ijtiḥād encompasses all spheres of life in order to achieve the common good of Man in every time and place.

The Muslim's reliance on his mind through ijtiḥād in all the matters about which there are no clear legal provisions was the pillar and the cornerstone marking the start of the application of the Muslim mind to build the Islamic civilization and culture throughout history and during the centuries that witnessed its power and creativity.

6. Islam and enlightenment

Many in our Arab Islamic world freely use concepts without specifying their meaning or clarifying their dimensions, making no attempt to verify the accuracy of their own understanding. This can lead to much confusion in thought and understanding and to the mix-up of concepts, and subsequently to errors

(22) Dr Ali Abdeladhim: *Mashyakhat al-Azhar mundu Inshaiha hatta al-Aan*. Vol 2, page 19 and after. Cairo, 1979.

(23) Dr Ali Abdeladhim: *Mashyakhat al-Azhar mundu Inshaiha hatta al-Aan*. Vol 2, page 19 and after. Cairo, 1979.

in judging people and matters. One of the known rules says that to pass judgment on a matter is dependent on having a proper conception thereof. If the issue at hand has not reached clarity in the mind and its dimensions have been identified, the judgment passed on this issue will be far from right.

A frequently mentioned and popular concept over the past decades has been the concept of enlightenment. This is one of those concepts that have been associated with many misunderstandings in the Arab Islamic world. It has been associated in minds with many negative connotations, some considering it synonymous with all forms of dissolution from values and beliefs, a contradiction of Islam and a license to abandon its teachings.

Since our Arab and Islamic societies are still in dire need of a comprehensive enlightenment movement to dislodge them from the state of intellectual torpor and long-standing material underdevelopment, the success of these efforts depends first and foremost on a proper understanding of what this enlightened movement is all about.

For this reason, we would like to bring some clarity to the notion of enlightenment in both the European and the Islamic perceptions, in an attempt to dispel some the confusion that may have riddled the minds of some, or the thick clouds that may have obscured the view and made it impossible to have a correct understanding of this beleaguered term.

7. Enlightenment in European thought

Before talking about enlightenment in the Islamic conception, it would be appropriate to refer first to the meaning of this term in the European context since it is widely used in its European sense in the Islamic intellectual context. Then we will move to enlightenment in Islam as a religion, then in the thought associated with this religion.

It is no secret that medieval Europe was living in a state of complete intellectual darkness and lived under the pressure of a despotic Church that hounded intellectuals wherever they were. A conflict raged there for many centuries between science and religion and between thinkers and theologians. It ended with the triumph of thought, a diminished power of the Church and the emancipation of science from religion.

The intellectual breakthrough of the 17th and 18th centuries was spearheaded by many Enlightenment thinkers, notably John Locke, David Hume and Newton in England, Voltaire and the Polymaths in France, and Leibniz and Kant in Germany. The concept of Enlightenment became synonymous with a European intellectual movement that saw in reason Man's true existence and sought to emancipate culture from ecclesiastical tutelage, nepotism and superstition. It advocated tolerance and believed in the advancement of humanity by seating life on natural and rational foundations and through empiricism.

The German philosopher Kant is credited with using the term *Aufklaerung* as an embodiment of the rational movement that began in Europe in the 17th century and reached its peak in the 18th century. Its influence spread throughout the European civilization and all the peoples affected by this European civilization.

Kant defined enlightenment as: *"Man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment."*⁽²⁴⁾

It is clear that the concept of enlightenment, as it had evolved in European thought, focused on the human mind and the need to promote it, as well as on freedom from any form of authority that restricts freedom of thought, including the authority of religion itself, and not only the ecclesiastical authority represented by theology. However, that did not mean a total rejection of religion as such.

After this clarification of enlightenment in European thought which undoubtedly had its particular circumstances that determined its orientation, we now turn to the concept of enlightenment in the Islamic perception.

8. Concept of enlightenment in Islam

The term enlightenment as it is used today is a relatively recent term in Arabic, but it is not strange to it. It is derived from light which is the antonym of

(24) R. Eislet: *Kant - Lexikon*, P. 50, Hildesheim 1964.

darkness and ignorance which is a form of darkness. If we look at Arabic dictionaries, we will find that enlightenment means lighting and revealing.⁽²⁵⁾ It is said: نور الصبح تنويراً meaning the light of the morning has become visible, and when the term is used in relation to a tree as in the tree lighted up, it means that it has flowered.⁽²⁶⁾

Islam does not reject the European enlightenment based on reason but considers that it is not sufficient. Enlightenment in the Islamic perspective is more general and comprehensive than its counterpart in the European definition. Enlightenment in Islam is based on two pillars: faith and reason.

The first pillar, which is religion in the proper sense, means leaving darkness for light, and light means clarity, which in turn means in religion shunning complexity and ambiguity in beliefs and laws.

If we look at the Holy Quran we will find that the Almighty sent Muhammad (PBUH) to guide people out of darkness and into the light, from the darkness of old ignorant and corrupt beliefs and traditions to the light of knowledge and true beliefs and traditions seated on true religion and clear reasoning. There are many Quranic verses in this regard showing that religion, with its divine content, came to light the way before people in life, and to cast away blindness from eyes and the darkness from hearts.

This light, represented by faith, came to bolster and assist another light, the second pillar of Islamic enlightenment, namely the light of reason. The mind or reason is described by Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali as "a model of divine light"⁽²⁷⁾ and by al-Jahidh as "Allah's proxy in Man". These two lights thus cooperate in guiding Mankind to safety. This cooperation is found in all Islamic beliefs and laws. Nothing in Islam can be found to contradict the conclusions of a sound rational mind.

It is clear that Islam is in itself an enlightening message that seeks to build a sound human being who can play to the fullest the role entrusted to him in this existence. Islam's teachings have revealed the right path to Man to help

(25) *Mukhtar al-Sohhah*.

(26) *Al-Qamous al-Mouhit*.

(27) Imam al-Ghazali: *Mishkat al-Anwar*. Authenticated by Dr Abu al-'Ila al-Afifi, Cairo, 1964.

him perform his role in this life. Such role is based on knowledge which opens Man's eyes and mind to wide horizons, qualifying him to people the earth and create a civilization that stands for both material and moral advancement. Hence, Islam has made the quest for knowledge one of the obligatory duties that are no less important than prayer, fasting, *zakat* and *hajj*.

Knowledge was not the only weapon that Allah armed Man with to empower him to accomplish the role assigned to him in this universe. There were many other advantages that Allah bestowed on Man, all of which enables him to achieve miracles in the world in which we live, and where we stand as witnesses to what has been achieved thus far. The future generations will also stand witness to future achievements that to us may seem impossible now.

One of the many blessings that Allah singled Man out with from among all other creatures -mentioned earlier⁽²⁸⁾ is that He appointed him as His vice-regent on earth and a master of this universe. Allah favored him over all other creatures, blessed him with knowledge, gave him freedom, entrusted him with responsibility and harnessed the entire universe for him to engage in both his material and spiritual activities. The Holy Quran affirmed all these meanings in many instances.

Man attained this elevated honorable status thanks to the reason that Allah singled him out with. Islam extolled reason and called for relying on it in the matters of faith, responsibility and obligation. The reference to reason is made in the Quran only in exalted terms, emphasizing the obligation to use the mind and refer to it in all matters. This can be inferred from all the Quranic verses where reference is made to reason.

When the Quran addresses the mind, it does so in all its faculties and characteristics. The Quran addresses the mind that inhibits conscience from sins, grasps facts, discerns matters, balances opposites, ponders, considers, draws lessons and excels at perception and vision. ⁽²⁹⁾

Therefore, the Quran's call to Man to use his intellectual faculties was a clear invitation that needs no further interpretation. Islam made reasoning, which

(28) See above.

(29) Cf. Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad: *AI-Tafkir Faridatun Islamiyya*.

is one of the key functions of the human mind, an obligatory task and an Islamic duty. If engaging in reasoning processes is a religious duty in Islam, it is on the other hand an inescapable obligation that Man cannot shirk. He will be held accountable for its good use or its misuse, in the same way he will account for the use of his other sensory faculties.

From the very beginning, Islam has stressed the need for the human mind to exercise the functions that God designed for it. This explains Islam's keenness to pave the way for the mind and remove all obstacles that could hinder the exercise of its functions. The teachings of Islam favored the removal of these impediments so that the mind can forge its path towards correct understanding and sound thinking.

Examples of this are many and corroborate each other. The most important of them are:

First: the rejection of intellectual dependence and blind imitation. When Islam ordered us to use our minds in considering universal phenomena, it also cautioned us against imitation which involves a deactivation of the mind's role in the universe. Imitation is an anomaly acceptable from animals but totally rejected from Man who is capable of reasoning and discernment. The Quran admonished the infidels for their blind imitation of their traditions and ancestors and took great umbrage to such imitation. The Prophet (PBUH) also warned against senseless imitation when he said: "*Do not be a blind follower.*"⁽³⁰⁾ The Prophet (PBUH) did not want Muslims to be blind followers who walk behind every loud voice, but to put their minds to the task and discern what harms them and what benefits them. There is no authority in Islam for anyone after Allah's Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger (PBUH), hence the saying attributed to Imam Malik: "*We can accept the words of a person and reject some of them, except for the words of the Man in this grave,*" pointing to the grave of the Prophet (PBUH).

Secondly: Eliminating all forms of charlatanism, sorcery and superstitious beliefs. No harm or benefit can be done except by the will of Allah who tells

(30) Narrated by al-Tirmidi: "*Do not become blind followers, saying that if our people are good we will be good, and if they are unjust we will be unjust. Rather, decide for yourselves. If the people are good then be good, but if they are evil then do not be unjust.*"

us in the Holy Quran that He is nearer to us than our jugular veins, that He is close to us and answers our prayers if we ask. The Prophet (PBUH) said: *"If you ask, ask Allah, and if you seek help, then seek the help of Allah."*⁽³¹⁾ There is no creature that controls other worshippers in the name of religion.

The canons of Islam are crystal clear and carry no inconsistencies with the recommendations of reason. The Prophet (PBUH) stood firmly in the face of such beliefs. When the death of his son Ibrahim coincided with a solar eclipse, some of the companions said that the sun had shared his grief over the death of Ibrahim. The Prophet (PBUH) immediately confronted this with firm rejection, saying: *"The sun and the moon are two of Allah's miracles and they do not go into eclipse over the death of one or the birth of another,"*⁽³²⁾ as mentioned earlier when we spoke of the value of learning.

Third is the focus of Islam on individual responsibility. Every individual is responsible for his actions, and no one carries the brunt of another person's deeds. The verses of the Quran are clear and categorical, and individual responsibility is based solely on the individual's freedom and confidence in the enjoyment of his rights to his own safety and the security of his intellectual freedom and property. Thus, Islam has made the safety and preservation of the mind one of the sine qua non conditions set by the Islamic Charia to guarantee religious and worldly interests, and these conditions are the **preservation of religion, soul, mind, offspring and property.**⁽³³⁾

Fourth: Islam freed the monotheist believer from unjustified fear and elevated him to the status of great honor described in the Quran: [***But honor belongs to Allah and His Apostle and to the Believers.***]⁽³⁴⁾ To make this principle tangible, the Prophet (PBUH) warned the believers against allowing needfulness to justify renouncement to their dignity: *"Seek the things you need with self-respect and dignity, for all matters run according to Divine*

(31) Narrated by al-Tirmidi and Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal.

(32) Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

(33) Al-Shatibi: *Al-Muafaqat*, vol. 2, page 10. Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut.

(34) Al-Munafiqun, verse 8.

Ordainment."⁽³⁵⁾ Islam also decided that there is can be no obedience to a creature in matters entailing disobedience of the Creator, and that the true believer does not fear blame when he adheres to righteousness.

Perhaps the main characteristics of enlightenment from an Islamic perspective have become clear through what has preceded. Islam freed the power of the mind from all restraints, salvaged it from the imitation that enslaved it. Thus, through religion, man was granted two great benefits of which he was deprived for long, namely free will and free opinion and thought, as Sheikh Mohammed Abdu said in *Risalat al-Tawheed*. Islam's fundamental position on reason had a great impact in shaping the Islamic civilization and Islamic thought which managed to present humanity with a glorious civilization that is one of the longest living civilizations of history.

1. Enlightenment in Islamic thought

Guided by these teachings, Islamic thought forged a clear path for itself, emphasizing the need for synergy between reason and religion and finding no reason for contradiction between the two. Reason is similar to a foundation while faith is the edifice, says Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali. One cannot exist without the other. A foundation without an edifice would be of no use, and no edifice can stand tall without its foundations. Al-Ghazali also says: "*Faith is reason from outside and reason is faith from within, they corroborate each other and are even in unison.*"⁽³⁶⁾ Al-Ghazali then says: "*He who advocates blind imitation with no exercise of reason is an ignorant, and he who is content with the abstraction of the mind from the guiding lights of the Quran and the Sunnah is conceited.*"⁽³⁷⁾ This balanced view prevailed widely among Muslim scholars.

(35) Narrated by Tammam Ibn Muhammad al-Dimashqi in his book *al-Fawa'id*, and Ibn Assakir in *Tarikh Dimashq*. The gist of the *hadith* is correct though *hadith* scholars debated its chain of narration.

(36) Al-Ghazali: *Ma'arij al-Quds*, page 59 and after. Cairo, 1927.

(37) Al-Ghazali: *Ihyaa 'Ulum ad-Dine*, Vol 3, page 16. Al-Halabi edition, Cairo, 1939.

From an Islamic perspective, no postulate can be presented on a premise of rivalry between faith and reason, and that Man has to choose between the two. In fact, they are two complementary, not contradictory, elements for which Man has a need. True faith does not prevent the mind from philosophizing nor does it negate its right to understand and contemplate the kingdom of the heavens and earth. Instead, it unleashes it to explore the horizons of the universe through observation and inspiration and even pushes it to pursue that urge. Reason –in the Islamic concept-, is the frame of reference of man's humanity, its meaning and its essence. If reason is disabled through ignorance and negligence, this would mean the annihilation of his humanity and his relegation to an order lower than that of animals.

This fact was further confirmed by Sheikh Muhammad Abdu in his book *Risalat at-Tawheed* when he said: "*Reason and faith came into symbiosis for the first time in a holy book through the words of a prophet sent with a message that needs no interpretation. It was agreed among all Muslims –except for those that cannot be trusted neither in their reason nor in their faith- that some matters of the faith can only be accepted through reason, such as knowledge of the existence of Allah and His ability to send messengers,*"⁽³⁸⁾ and other matters related to understanding the gist of the divine message and believing in it. "*They also agreed, in consensus, that while religion may propose what may be hard to understand, it cannot propose what is rationally impossible.*"⁽³⁹⁾ Thus, the mind, as Sheikh Mohammed Abdu says, is one of the most effective tools of Islam.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The best example to cite on enlightenment in Islamic thought is the philosopher Ibn Rushd who is specifically chosen because there is hardly any disagreement about his pioneering role in the enlightenment movement. Ibn Rushd's enlightened thought played a critical part in supporting the logical movement in Middle Ages Europe and up to modern times. There is also no disagreement over his enlightenment leadership among modern Islamic thinkers, regardless of the divergence of their leanings.

(38) Sheikh Muhammad Abdu: *Risalat al-Tawheed*, page 45. Dar Ihyaa al-'Ulum, Beirut, 1979.

(39) Ibid.

(40) Ibid, page 53.

But Middle Ages Europeans understood the thought of Ibn Rushd in a way contrary to what he himself intended. They focused on the aspect of reason and neglected the one of faith, misunderstanding this thought and overloading his ideas with undesirable additions. This calls for rereading the thought of Ibn Rushd in order to review many of the statements issued about him, in the hope of revealing the true face of this great philosopher, far from the influences of certain ideologies, and poring over his distinct works to do justice to him and to the enlightenment he aspired to.

This prompts us to start by uncovering one aspect of Ibn Rushd's thought that was neglected by many of those who wrote about him or quoted his thought in support of the theory of enlightenment. Ibn Rushd, the well-known philosopher is also Ibn Rushd the jurist who was appointed as a magistrate in Seville and then in Cordoba. His book *Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtassid* is one of the most important works of Islamic independent reasoning. Ibn Rushd the philosopher who demanded the application of the mind did not imply by that the rejection or trivialization of religious teachings, not only at the theoretical level, but also at the practical level. Ibn Rushd the jurist did not leave the smallest aspect in the systems governing transactions within society without addressing it in his above book and basing it on Islamic foundations.

It is surely unfair that only one part of his thought is embraced while the other aspects are ignored due to some presuppositions or prejudices.

Ibn Rushd, the philosopher who attacked al-Ghazali in his book *Tahafut at-Tahafut* defending reason, affirming its cognitive role, and rejecting every diminution of the role of the mind, is the same who said in his book *Fasl al-Maqal*:

"We Muslims know beyond doubt that demonstrative consideration does not lead to a contradiction of the Charia. What is right cannot contradict what is right, it concurs with it and corroborates it." ⁽⁴¹⁾

(41) Ibn Rushd: *Fasl al-Maqal fima bayna al-Hikma wal Shari'a min al-Ittisal*, page 19, Beirut, 1982.

This means that Ibn Rushd the jurist was not in contradiction with Ibn Rushd the philosopher, because the truth was one for him, though it took many forms. For him, no religious truth can be accepted when it contradicts a philosophical truth, and there should be no contradiction in the first place so long as this truth is the same. If it appears that a religious text is understood to contradict reason, the text must be interpreted in such a way as to remove any apparent conflict. Many other Muslim scholars agreed with this approach, including al-Ghazali himself.⁽⁴²⁾

Ibn Rushd was fully convinced of the absence of contradiction between the philosophical truth and the religious truth and vehemently defended this conviction. He did not wish to detract from one of these truths for the benefit of the other; and thus the relationship between these two truths remained balanced in his thought and transcended any contradiction.

Philosophy, he says is "*the friend and milk sister of religion, they are in harmony and symbiosis in essence and nature.*"⁽⁴³⁾ Thus, provoking any form of antagonism between them, in the words of Ibn Rushd, would be the deed of people with "*evil fancies and perverted beliefs*", or "*ignorant friends*".⁽⁴⁴⁾

The texts of Ibn Rushed are straightforward and clear and do not need to be construed or interpreted. They show that Ibn Rushd's enlightenment was two-pronged: a religious part and a philosophical one. And since a bird cannot fly with one wing, Ibn Rushd's enlightenment cannot be understood under a one-sided light: reason-based enlightenment is required at the same time as religious enlightenment. It would be no exaggeration to say that each is intrinsically connected to the other, and the success of either in our Islamic world hinges upon the success of the other.

(42) The key principle in the law of interpretation that Ibn Rushd laid down does not totally oppose what al-Ghazali had already said despite the apparent divergence in their views about other details. Al-Ghazali says: "*For we have a norm for interpretation, viz. when reasoning and its proof show the falsity of the literal meaning of a text we know of necessity that what is intended is something different*". See Al-Ghazali's *Fadhaih Al-Batiniyya*, page. 53, Cairo, 1964.

(43) *Fasl al-Maqal*, page 28.

(44) *Ibid*, page 38.

It is clear from the above that the true face of Islamic enlightenment is apparent at the two levels of reason and faith. Furthermore, Ibn Rushd's enlightenment differs in its goals and means from 18th century European enlightenment, mainly because of the difference in the circumstances that prevailed in both the European society and the one where Ibn Rushd lived. European enlightenment chose the path of reason, moving away from religion while faith and reason merged in unique symbiosis in the enlightenment of Ibn Rushd who was helped by his Islamic faith in taking this position.

This finds further confirmation in the many writings of Sheikh Mohammed Abdu. He asserted that *“reason must rule in the same way as faith. Religion is recognized through reason and we need an ijihad that relies on reason and faith together to face the new challenges arising in the modern civilization and derive from them what is of benefit to us. Muslims cannot live in isolation and must arm themselves with what others are arming themselves with. The best weapon in the world is knowledge and the strongest pillar of morals is faith. The Muslims are fortunate in that their religion opens their hearts to learning and knowledge and exhorts them to pursue them and to aspire to the ethics advocated by today's civilization.”*⁽⁴⁵⁾

Ibn Rushd advocated an open attitude to other cultures, *“Wisdom is the quest of the faithful wherever they may find it.”* Ibn Rushd explains in his book *Fasl al-Maqal fee ma Bayna al-Hikma wal Sharia min al-Ittissal* that acquainting oneself with the books of the ancestors through reading and exploration (and even more the books of later authors) is a duty, as long as their goal is the very purpose that faith urged us to pursue, i.e. applying reason to what exists and striving to learn it and take it into consideration. In this regard, Ibn Rushd says:

“We consider what they said and what they proved in their books. What we find to be in agreement with what is right we gladly take and thank them for it. What we find to be against the truth, we alert them to it, caution them against it and excuse them for it.”⁽⁴⁶⁾

(45) Ahmed Amine: *Zu'maa al-Isslah fil 'Assr al-Hadith*, pp 337.

(46) *Fasl al-Maqal*, page 17.

We believe the time has come for us to consider the thought of Ibn Rushd in an integral way. This would entail a careful re-reading of Ibn Rushd, free of the weight of assumptions and the old and new statements widely spread about Ibn Rushd, until we can see with absolute clarity the true face of Ibn Rushd's thought, give due credit to knowledge and to Ibn Rushd himself.

Our modern Arab and Muslim societies are in dire need for this kind of philosophical and religious enlightenment in order to raise a sound and rational awareness and reform religious awareness. Only thus will it be possible to fight those with "*evil fancies and perverted beliefs*," and "*ignorant friends*" as was the desire of Ibn Rushd in his own words as he concluded his book *Fasl al-Maqal*:

"This is why heresies have multiplied. It is our desire to devote our time to this object and achieve it effectively, and if God grants us a respite of life we shall work steadily towards it in so far as this is made possible for us; and it may be that that work will serve as a starting point for our successors. For our soul is in the utmost sorrow and pain by reason of the evil fancies and perverted beliefs which have infiltrated this religion and particularly such [afflictions] as have happened to it at the hands of people who claim an affinity with philosophy."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Eight hundred years after his departure, Ibn Rushd is still alive among us, diagnosing the ills of our societies and prescribing treatment. The observer of our Muslim societies will find a flaw in religious understanding among large swathes of the population, especially younger generations. He will also find many myths and illusions that continue to nestle in the minds of many of the Ummah's children.

Ibn Rushd's enlightened approach, consistent with the approach of Islam, is the appropriate one for our contemporary Islamic societies, to guide them onto the path of light and freedom, and for their children to enjoy wellbeing and stability and set out freely on the broad horizons of progress and prosperity. Only thus will they be able to keep pace with modern times while at the same time preserving their identity which finds itself, at this age of globalization, exposed to dangers of which the gravity is known to Allah only.

(47) *Fasl al-Maqal*, page 38.

Reflections on the Future of Islam

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Islam reaffirms its future:

Anyone attempting to study the future of Islam in the early days of Islamic da'wa would have thought that it was a religion with no future. Many of the Arabs and Jews that the Prophet addressed through the Holy Quran as he invited them to believe in Allah (SWT) alone, without coercing any of them into submission, opposed this religion and fought it so fiercely that the number of its opponents exceeded by far that of its followers.

Yet, this religion was preached in such beautiful and gentle manner that it ultimately persuaded the unbelievers and the hypocrites to embrace Islam en masse. The Almighty says in the Quran: ***[invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.]***⁽¹⁾.

The Holy Quran was the greatest and most powerful tool in spreading the word of Islam. Listening to the Holy Quran and pondering its verses planted the seeds of faith in hearts. Islam embodied the future that we continue to witness today, a most honorable future indeed to judge by the masses that believed in it and elected it as their religion.

The secret of Islam lies in its status as the religion of all mankind. It is not the religion of the community in which it was revealed, nor of the Arabs to the exclusion of non-Arabs. It addresses the mind, the heart and the conscience of humanity at large.

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(1) (An-Nahl, verse 125).

This is one point in favor of Islam, and this assertion enables Muslims to preach Islam with wisdom and gentle exhortation as ordered by the Holy Quran, applying reason and reflection and hoping for the best, as opposed to intimidation and threats with hellfire and excruciating pain. The call to Islam also goes through applying what this religion advocates in human relations: helping the poor, relieving the suffering of the sick, educating the ignorant, helping the infirm, meeting the frowning face with good and compassionate words, guiding children and tending to the orphaned, then elevating the standard of debate to a quest for the truth and not a desire to defeat. From the day the Quran was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), the invitation to Islam has never been an invitation to oppress and coerce.

Allah Almighty says: ***[If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!]***⁽²⁾.

Neither the Prophet nor the Muslims were the delegated keepers of people.

On this subject, Allah (SWT) says: ***[If it had been Allah's plan, they would not have taken false gods: but We made thee not one to watch over their doings, nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs.]***⁽³⁾.

The successful da'wa was therefore one that uses wisdom, beautiful exhortation and gentle argumentation, and not violence, antagonism or enmity.

Islam was never limited to the rites of praying and to fasting. Many a fasting person gains nothing from his fast save hunger and thirst. Islam, in addition to those rites, advocates good morals and treatment of others and cooperation in good deeds.

The Almighty says: ***[It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or west; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be***

(2) Yunus, verse 99.

(3) Al-An'am, 107.

***steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah fearing.]]*⁽⁴⁾.**

The future of Islam is also reflected in good relations between the rulers and the ruled. Those governing are not the masters of those they govern. Instead, they are entrusted with the management of their affairs to help them improve their social and political lives, true to the essence of Islam, as opposed to treating them with violence and exploitation, or harnessing them to serve personal material and moral interests. Whether by virtue of Islam or humanity, a ruler is not allowed to treat his subjects with contempt, let alone kill them or commission their murder. Many are the instances seen in Islamic countries where rulers ill-treat, persecute and murder their citizens, or abuse their power against them, drain their resources or neglect their welfare and interests. Most believe these to be the teachings of Islam and thus develop misperceptions of this religion, considering that these rulers' actions against their own people stem from Islam and as such, that this religion is against humanity. And that can never play in favor of the future of Islam.

The call to Islam is still the duty and right of all Muslims who are intellectually, morally and socially qualified to engage in it. As in Islam's early times, da'wa is carried out through gentle exhortation and without coercion or intimidation. It is the right and duty of the Muslim, to be fully and freely exercised.

Just as the great Christian nations have allowed themselves to establish churches in Muslim lands, to mobilize thousands of monks and nuns in preaching Christianity –though they belong to secular states in orientation and laws-, Muslims also have the right to mobilize preachers to spread the word of Islam, both in non-religious and religious communities. No one is forced to convert to Islam, but it is the right and duty of all Muslims to invite to it without prejudicing anyone or to trying to divert anyone, against their will, from their religion.

(4) Al-Baqara, Verse 177.

This is a message to be used in building the future of Islam, provided it does not provoke animosity towards Islam or a religious war against it. Islam after all recognizes true Christianity and Judaism and considers Jesus, son of Maryam, and Moses (peace upon them) as prophets sent by Allah and who must be believed in. Islam is therefore the religion that inherited the legacy of all divine religions since it regulates all their precepts, principles and true divine canons.

The call to the way of the Almighty is thus the only path to building a prosperous future for Islam.

Intellectuals and the future of Islam

There is no future for a system, theory, ideology or religion without intellectuals. The intellectual is the backbone of theory, illustration, opinion, construction and action. Without the intellect of theoreticians and the philosophers of doctrines and ideologies, all of these would not exist. Politicians and rulers are regulators and executors, but the creator, validator and builder is the intellectual. Religions did not develop in the absence of intellectuals. Allah (SWT) instructed Muhammad Ibn Abdallah with the Holy Quran though he was illiterate. He (PBUH) realized this and said: *«Allah taught and He taught me well,»*⁽⁵⁾.

All those who spearheaded Islamic thought -not the rule of Islam alone- were intellectuals steeped in the concepts of the Quran and the principles and teachings of Islam. Could there be a better way to educate the intellectual than the Quran, particularly at the time when the Noble Quran was the constitution of Islam?

At all times in history, Islam advanced not only through the power of the state, but also through the authority of intellectuals, scholars, fundamentalist theoreticians, politicians, thinkers and philosophers. This scientific, intellectual and ideological force that studied Islam and guaranteed its religious, scientific

(5) The hadith is sound in meaning but not in sanad (chain of transmission). It features in Ibn Al-Jawzi's *Al-'ilal al-Mutanahiya Fi al-Ahadith al-Wahiya*.

and moral radiance, is what preserved Islam in its might despite the decline of rules and the succession of regimes. It also entrenched Islam in the minds and hearts of all Muslim peoples. State power would not have been able to do so were it not for scholars, jurists and theoreticians.

The future of Islam is confronted to serious challenges, foremost of which are:

- **Strong animosity from states, politicians and intellectuals who accuse it of terrorism. Each of them is plotting, openly and in secrecy, to combat Islam using dangerous means. Some of these have Muslim origins and an Islamic culture. They cite events that occurred in some European countries (the killing of the Charlie-Hebdo journalists, the Amsterdam-Paris train accident, and the killing of scores of innocent people in Paris, Brussels, Abidjan, Ouagadougou and Berlin).**
- **The absence of Islamic culture teaching in most schools of the Islamic world. This has resulted in ignorance of Islam, particularly among younger generations.**
- **Hiding behind the name of Islam when carrying out international and national political activities.**

All of this and more has influenced the march of Islam and its spread among people. It has undermined its status as an open-minded and liberal religion that can contribute to steering life in the future.

Emphasis must be put here on the need for culture and intellectuals to shed light on the fundamentals of Islam and its essence, as well as to reintroduce these through all communication means (including social media) and defend them at scientific, political and social forums. Intellectuals are called upon to mobilize their minds and pens to debate in the best possible manner, expose the fallacies, myths and lies arbitrarily attributed to Islam and of which it is innocent.

Only genuine scholars, and certainly not pseudo intellectuals, can rise to this challenge. Those who study the Quran and acquire the ability to fathom the depths of its concepts, convey its message using the best written, audio and video communication means.

It would be sheer danger to leave these tasks to people whose culture and knowledge fall short of the ability to delve deep into Islam and its concepts, or those who regurgitate the words of ignorant scholars and market-place preachers, those whose knowledge is as limited as their understanding of the realities of Islam, denounced by both science and religion.

Defending Islam and its future requires answering all the questions that face mankind in these times. These are primarily intellectual and religious dilemmas, but also economic and social problems. Many can only answer these questions in a negative way that perhaps entails a total renouncement to religion and moral obligations.

Means used by intellectuals:

Scholars and thinkers who address the essence of Islam, writers, authors, journalists and filmmakers, all those who, besides their knowledge, possess the impactful instruments of information and communication, must all contribute to conveying the word of Islam through their writings, articles, researches, stories, novels, plays and movies in order to address Islamic issues and misconceptions and unfair allegations fabricated against Islam. Then they must find the best ways to put Islam in its rightful place in the thought and community of Muslims and believers, and truthfully project its image as an open and liberal religion that fosters and spreads morality among all people, and proclaim its place within open societies that are not driven by ethnic or colonial ideas or a historical, intellectual or unyielding religious or Zionist enmity.

Topping the list of accusations against Islam is that it is a terrorist or regressive and reactionary religion, that it considers as enemies all other religions and their followers, that it is passé, a religion of superstition and attachment to the marabous and mausoleums of holy men, a religion of power, hostile to freedom, justice and human rights, or a religion of the ignorant and the uncouth, a religion of mysticism, a religion that belies reason and logic, or a religion that benefits only the commoners, the do-nothings and the rustic.

These accusation and many others, are up for rectification, debate and scientific reasoning and are not to be addressed with emotional intolerance as this would never lead to persuasion or win over persons. While some scholars and thinkers are focusing on this aspect of the argument, others

should dedicate their efforts to present Islam as it truly is to every intellectual, reader and witness, and not as it came to be perceived through the ideas of the ignoramuses among Muslim “scholars” and jurists, those who designated themselves to promote virtue and prevent vice.

Thus we come to the conclusion that the mission of Muslim intellectuals in building the future of Islam is a noble one. It requires deep reflection on Islam and courage to present its true ideas in all the languages of the world. The Arabic language is not sufficient since its readers are limited in numbers and those who can benefit from what is published in this language are even more limited.

An open religion that supports society and the State

When Islam invited mankind to believe in God and heed the message revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), it was conscious that mankind’s differences in origins and in the long history experienced by each ethnic, linguistic or national community will make it difficult to bring them all together within one community. Yet, they can all come together around one faith and convergent ideals, i.e. Islam which set no distinction between peoples of different color, race, tribe or creed.

The mission of Islam is therefore to ensure that people believe in the Almighty and heed His injunctions, for He knows best their worldly affairs. This makes the Prophet (PBUH) the guardian of humanity even if he was sent to convey the call to Islam and preach adherence to its teachings. Other than this, each person pursues a goal to which Allah steers him.

Almighty says: [***Now have come to you, from your Lord, proofs (to open your eyes): if any will see, it will be for (the good of) his own soul; if any will be blind, it will be to his own (harm): I am not (here) to watch over your doings.***]⁽⁶⁾.

This is the open-minded aspect of Islam that favors the creation of a harmonious society that partakes of its worldly life under Islam, promotes the empowerment of the State to better manage the higher interests of Muslims,

(6) Al-An’am, Verse 104.

uniting them against destructive division and preserving security to shield them against wars, united around the word of Islam and adhering to the religious and social teachings of the Holy Quran. Apart from this, they are free in their lives and economic, social and human activity.

In his lifetime, the Prophet (PBUH) presented an exemplary experience through which he charted the path before all believers. An opportunity to do so arose when he migrated to Medinah after being harassed by Qurayshi infidels trying to murder him and stifle Islam, fearful that he might rise to the leadership of Mecca and that his family – the clan of Abi Taleb- would come to head Quraysh and control the Kaaba and its keepers. They had a social standing they needed to preserve and feared Muhammad and his followers.

When Muhammad (PBUH) migrated to Medinah seeking a new world before Islam, he found its inhabitants welcoming and willing to answer the call of Islam. Their hearts were not devoured by hatred, jealousy and ambition for sovereignty. The people of Medinah grew quickly familiar with his call and positively responded to him. They listened to the Quran he recited with an alert mind and a pure heart, and their humane treatment manifested itself in the brotherhood bonds the people of Medinah forged with those who had migrated with Muhammad or followed him later. These strangers to Medinah had left behind them wealth and property, only to find the Ansars who supported them and embraced the light that accompanied the revelation of the Holy Quran. None of these Muhajireens felt strange or in exile in Medinah.

Thus, the new community of Medinah was formed from a group of Muhajireens and a community of Ansars who supported and championed Islam. At the same time, families that constituted two or three Jewish tribes left Medinah, namely Banu Quraidha, Banu Annadhir and Banu Qunaiqaa. Muslims had little trust in the Jews even though they were a minority among the population and needed protection and care to preserve their status in Medinah. Along with this dual community, the Jews did not accept Islam nor did they treat Muslims in a way that would encourage them to feel safe in their Islam.

The Prophet (PBUH) approached different nations and peoples to lay the foundations of this kaleidoscopic society. Muhammad (PBUH) did not impose Islam on the Jews, or on any other Arab community he preached to. Some of them accepted the faith, others rejected it. Meanwhile, the Prophet did not

object to the presence of a Jewish community within the Muslim society.

The alliance concluded by the Prophet in Medinah is considered as the nucleus of the first Islamic state and had all the trimmings of a state as it was perceived by Muslims in these early days. The Prophet was the leader of the Muslims, directing them to manage the state of Islam when it was limited within Medinah, to defend this religion and freedom of faith and Islamic action, to arbitrate between them according to the precepts revealed by Allah Almighty, and then leave them with a free reign to build the society they wished to have within the context of Islam. Thus, they proceeded to live their economic and social life, serving as soldiers whenever they were called to the defense of Islam. Under the Prophet's command, they headed to Mecca intending to perform the haj but Quraysh closed ranks against them and they had to conclude an agreement with Meccans to postpone their pilgrimage to the following year. The Prophet accepted this peacefully and set out instead to prepare properly and escalate this journey into a conquest of Mecca and the return of Islam to this town, bolstered by the force of its believers, some from Mecca, others from Medinah.

This historical attribute of the Prophet (PBUH) and his actions with his own people and with strangers confirm two facts:

First, the verity mentioned earlier, namely that Islam is the religion of all humanity, and that though the Prophet did not establish the first state in Mecca which was the cradle of Islam, the universality of this message is what enabled him to create this state in Medinah, and it was a wise move to form the state outside Mecca.

Secondly, Islam's call was no longer limited to the invitation to the way of the Almighty Allah. The wider the circle of believers was, the more capable they were of making this state the protector of Islam and a means to defend it, to live a free life, their ultimate goal being, along with Islam to build state and society as dictated by the needs of protecting borders and economy, guarantee the subsistence means of its members, bring the human element out of the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy into the light of knowledge, forge social bonds that favor enterprise and serving mutual interests with kin and kith, and form the greater organized unit of the Islamic community.

Islam as the religion of the state does not focus on building the state as it is known today. It does not negate that which elevates the status of the Islamic state and society in worldly matters, nor does it deny the multiplicity of entities within society. Medinah had several Arab tribes, as was the case with Mecca, with a Jewish religious minority. The Prophet (PBUH) did not deny its existence in society and even went into a covenant with the Jews to preserve the peace, as long as they remained peaceable towards Muslims. His aim was to establish a society that was not hostile to Islam, capable of confronting Quraysh's attacks from Mecca and its surroundings. Yet, the Muslims in Medinah were not spared Qurayshi invasions. Quraysh came together and fought Muslims in their own backyard, in battles of which the most renowned four were Badr, Uhud, Hunayn and al-Ahzab.

During the battle of Badr, the Muslims defeated Quraysh in a great victory. Seeking revenge, Quraysh barred the way before Muslim tribes when some of the fighters abandoned the battle field, eager to collect the spoils of war.

This defeat enticed Quraysh to plot ways to annihilate Muhammad (PBUH) and his religion. They were further encouraged by Medinah's Jews who pledged to stand by their side.

In the battle of al-Ahzab or al-Khandaq, the third battle where the Jews cooperated with the invaders, Muslims were then victorious after barricading themselves behind a trench around Medinah.

It thus became clear to Quraysh that they would not affect Islam and its messenger in Medinah, his new capital. And the prophet gained certainty of the secret and insidious hostility the Jews nurtured, in their different tribes, towards Islam.

Muhammad (PBUH) entered into a pact with the Jewish tribes of Bani Qunaiqa', Bani Nadhir and Bani Quraydha that they would keep their own faith. But they all broke this covenant, plotted against Muslims individually, and cooperated with the hegemonic Arab tribes. Their punishment was to be besieged until they were evicted from Medinah.

This idea is not too far from the point this work drives at, namely that Islam had established its state in Medinah. With this state, Muhammad (PBUH) was able to guarantee the triumph of Islam over the hostile Arab Meccan tribes.

He also triumphed over those with whom he had entered into a covenant to keep their religion. Islam did not coerce anyone into submission, and yet they deceived and betrayed it through their individual treachery, then by allying themselves with the belligerent Meccan tribes.

The lesson we learn from Islam as it moved between Mecca and Medinah is its reliance on the state, on the one hand, and on the existence of a harmonious society in Medinah, composed of the indigenous tribes and the Muhajireens from Mecca and other parts. There was then a state and a diverse, multiracial society, and Jews would have been part of this society and expanded this sphere of pluralism.

Today, Muslims are called upon to live in states founded on what truly makes a state in present times, such as a democratic constitutional political system, and in a pluralistic society where Jews and Christians may be living alongside Muslims, as in Morocco, Egypt and other Muslim countries. They co-exist with Muslims under Islamic democratic rule, keeping their faith and some of their laws without their cohabitants imposing their religion or ideas, other than loyalty to and defense of the homeland as imposed by the law.

Today's societies are affected by the remnants of their past and the influences of traditions and interactions with other societies. This accumulation is the result of evolution and religion does not negate it as long as society remains attached to the precepts of Islam and its lofty teachings. Therefore, no one should renounce his or her society as long as all its members preserve the common tenets and lofty ideals of Islam. No Muslim can declare a fellow Muslim as an apostate over what he perceives as a perversion and no one has the right to mete out punishment outside the law which is the sole arbiter of people in a society with diverse attitudes and cultures and that is characterized by the freedom to act within the limits of the law.

Humanity is the limitless horizon of Islam

While former messengers were specifically sent to their own peoples, and at times their message did not yield the desired result for personal or tribal (Jewish and Christian) reasons, the message of Islam was sent to all mankind. It spoke to all human beings, even when some resisted it and others

embraced it. There was no distinction to set Islam's addressees apart, Arabs and non-Arabs, white and black races, Jews or Christians or the followers of some man-made creed. For this reason, this message's playing field was as wide as the earth's wide horizons.

The Muhammadan message has many fundamentals, first and foremost of which is the assertion of the oneness of God. Both the Noble Quran and the Prophet emphasized this principle that he debated with his own people and with the Jews and Christians who lived in the Arab Peninsula, in the same way he debated this aspect with his friends in his lifetime.

Islam's insistence on monotheism was a most important result that acquired two manifestations in the history of religion: the first is the darkness that prevailed over minds among the different nations and peoples, and in the small Meccan society where Muhammad (PBUH) saw light. All people wanted to worship a greater and more beneficial power to secure certain benefits through this worship: health, offspring or money, believing that the entity they worshipped could fulfill these for them. The absurdity of some was such that they worshipped the dead: their fathers or forefathers as patrons of god, even during their own lifetime. Some worshiped wild animals, others fashioned idols with their own hands and venerated them, while some did not worship a single idol but many. Despite their claims of intelligence, power and might, many Meccan Arabs worshipped and laid offerings at the feet of statues they had erected in the Kaaba.

Islam could not live in the midst of such mental illusions and this devotion to entities other than the Almighty. A Muslim cannot pray, give charity, perform Hajj and recite the Holy Quran while worshipping an idol he fashioned with his own hands, nor can he worship bones in a grave or believe in a bunch of deities, some for wellbeing, others for wealth, yet another for health, and a fourth for victory over enemies. Islam uprooted all these myths and this aberrance in matters of worship. It asserted that there was no God but Allah, and that belief in the oneness of Allah was the ultimate divide between the Muslim and the non-Muslim.

Once Man believes in Allah Almighty, he automatically begins to discuss and ponder the other pillars of faith.

The second aspect behind Islam's emphasis on the oneness of God is that before the time of Muhammad (PBUH), the apostles sent by Allah clashed with the people they were sent to guide about the first matter they tried to enlighten them about, namely belief in God and worshipping Him. Their people confronted them saying: "Do you want to divert us from what our forefathers worshipped before us?" In retaliation, they persecuted and tortured their messengers, even erecting bonfires to burn them, as with Ibrahim (peace be upon him).

Islam dealt strictly and firmly with this matter. Muhammad (PBUH) declared that he accepted in his religion only those who proclaimed that there was no God but Allah as the hadith is reported: "*If they say that, they have safeguarded their blood and wealth from me*"⁽⁷⁾. Barring this, they were connected to Islam in absolutely no way. And it was not enough to profess it in words, but it was necessary to act by it. Many ignorant people profess that there is no God but Allah, yet they glorify dead patrons and grovel to them at their graves. Such actions speak of the polytheism that Islam prohibited and that the Prophet fought against. Within the Meccan society there was a large group of such people who fought the Prophet, some of them did acquiesce to the existence of Allah Almighty, but they involved other deities in this worship.

The universality of Islam

The cornerstone of Islam is its universality as a religion for all mankind. It is not the religion of a particular tribe or community, but that of humanity at large, and as such, it does not recognize the superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs, or of this continent or that. This universality was at last understood by thinkers and politicians who named it globalization, and through which they seek to impose one political and economic system, and subsequently a single intellectual and social system, ensuring that all mankind fits in the same mold in thinking and management. Globalization is a movement aimed at standardizing domination by exporting thought, politics, governance systems, economic solutions and international affiliation to the most powerful in science, economy, arms and governance.

(7) Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim in a long hadith.

Islam is universal in a more civilized, fairer and wiser manner. In Islam, there is no dominance of one state over another, or of weaker people by others. Islam is universal in the sense of being the only religion sent to all humanity. It does not impose itself on others, but invites instead to a set of values, principles and ethics, to a reasonable mode of life and to a humanistic interaction among people.

In this universality, no specific thought dominates all those who worship Allah Almighty, protect themselves against the evils of life, fear Allah when dealing with others and therefore hurt no one, and deprive no one of the right to freedom, dignity and good behavior.

Why this definition of Islam's universality?

This universality aims to unite people around a righteous thought as they worship one God and cooperate in everything advancing the greater good of humankind, through peaceful cooperation where there is no master and servant, no powerful and weak, no rich and poor, and no victorious and defeated.

The universality of Islam does not mean that people should be cast in the same mold, but that they can be part of a universal unit of faith. There is freedom of action, freedom to choose the mode of government, and freedom to choose the rulers. There is also freedom in how people act within the respect of the law, freedom to choose an economic model suitable for the components of this or that country and which guarantees self-sufficiency, food security, housing and safety to people, as well as freedom to choose the right ally while remaining attached to beliefs and righteous behavior.

It is this Islamic universality that purged human thought of the perversions of faith, so long as all its believers worship Allah and adhere to what Islam requires from its followers.

This universality is meant to liberate mankind from misguided thought, divergence in visions and the race for the supremacy of one opinion over the other, this ideology or that logic in leadership and enslavement of peoples.

The universality of Islam achieves unity under freedom and discipline under the law, the respect of the other whilst cooperating with and complementing each other in the management of shared life. A supreme authority that regulates human society and guides it in the worship of one God, frees man from the veneration of human power, enslavement to money, and adulation of military or civilian might.

The Myth of European Superiority: “European Miracle” and Asian Recession

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The question that has intrigued many historians and political thinkers over the past decades can be phrased as follows: “Why Europe? Why has this relatively small stretch of Western Eurasia entered world stage in the sixteenth century, only to become towards the end of the nineteenth a dominant force practically around the entire globe?”

Until recently, two basic responses to this question have floated around in the circles of academia:

1. There was in Europe’s past something unique that determined the leap in economic evolution and the rise in power. This particular ‘something’ was defined as the greater good that encompassed mind, liberty and the individuality that must be spread among all humankind. One of the most famous works of this school is David Landes⁽¹⁾ ***The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are So Rich and Some So Poor?***
2. The second answer boils down to the fact that Europe’s past held nothing special until approximately 1500, and maybe until the year 1800. Europe’s supremacy in the 19th century was not linked to some exceptional qualities of the Europeans, but more to their good fortune when they managed to ferry the abundant wealth of the new world to their continent, as well

* This study was translated from Russian by Anwar Mohamed Ibrahim, a chapter from the book ***East and West: Clash or Harmony?*** published by al-Hay’a al-Masriyya al-’Ammal Lil Kitab, Cairo, 2011.

(1) David Landes: ***The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why some Are so Rich and some Are so Poor?*** New York, 1998.

as the riches of other parts of the globe thanks to a colonial sovereignty that materialized in exploitation and plundering of clear part of the world. Thinkers sharing this view believe that history over the last millennium witnessed the supremacy of the culture and economy of Asia, China in particular. The «eruption» of European power on the scene only occurred during the last two hundred and fifty years. One of the most representative books of this theory is ***ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*** by Andre Gunder Frank (note the wordplay where the word 'Orient' refers also to the East)⁽²⁾.

In recent times, theories on the world and politics and on the world and history have become less polarizing than earlier ones. Attempts of this kind do not stand out in any particular way. Marshall Hodgson⁽³⁾ raised similar issues for the first time in the early 1990s. But interest in such research has increased markedly in recent times. The representatives of this school of thought look at the last millennia in the light of interactions and mutual influences between the different parts of the planet that played a part in the development of humanity. The sources of this development were diverse and had a global impact.⁽⁴⁾ They took great interest in development problems, largely taking into account the factors of impact and comparison, rather than the problems of hegemony and sovereignty. Their theory seems to be more fitting for the age of globalization than the thinking mode of representatives of the two views, more suited for the «Cold War» era. British philosopher Karl Popper was apparently correct in his claim that all the scientific descriptions of facts are largely limited and influenced by the theories and that the best way to describe this case is to compare science to a spotlight... What the highlighting device shows depends on its location, direction, brightness, color, etc., although what we see also depends largely on the object being highlighted. In the same way, a scientific

(2) Andre Gunder Frank: ***ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age***. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

(3) Marshall Hodgson: ***Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History***. Cambridge, Edmund Burke, 1998.

(4) Roy Bin Wong: ***China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience***. Ithaca 1997. Pomeranx, Kenneth: ***The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy***. Princeton University Press, 2000.

description is also largely defined by our own perspective and concerns, usually related to the theory or opinion we wish to review, but also to the facts being described. According to him, a theory or an opinion can be presented as the materialization of a certain point of view.⁽⁵⁾

The notion of «European superiority» evolved from the tradition of analyzing the «Western Civilization» and has significantly spread in academic circles from the 1920s.

At the very same time, this theory became the subject of criticism, which reached its peak in the 1960s. In both theories, the key topics were the emergence of specifically “Western” values and Europe’s domination over the rest of the world. Why were Europe and the United States of America able to subsequently move forward? Were there some special qualities in Europe that played a crucial role in its receptiveness of capitalism? Why did India, China and the Arab world lag behind? When, in particular, did Europe acquire its weight in the global capitalist system? And for how long will that last? At the same time, can it be said that China has been dominated over the greater part of the last millennium? Being most controversial, questions of this sort have contributed to the stand-off between the “West” and the «East».

Thus we came close to the notion of the West’s supremacy. The American philosopher Francis Fukuyama presented it as the only alternative to human organization in this age of industrialization and advanced communications, these two embodying the convergence of market economy and a democratically-limited government marked by pluralism. It must be admitted that even the most profound thinkers could not avoid the global «European excellence». The insightful British sociologist Anthony Giddons described modernity as the liberation of the reflexive appropriation of knowledge during the implementation of the Western project that is inherently globalized and which must naturally be supported.⁽⁶⁾

(5) Karl Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Moscow, al-Mubadara al-Thaqafiyya, 1992, vol. 2, pp. 300-301.

(6) Anthony Giddens: *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, University of California Press, p. 175, 1990

Eurocentrism is thus either a conscious or an unconscious exercise focused on European interests, culture and values (or Western ones on a broader scope) at the expense of all other cultures. This vision cannot be described as uncommon. The dichotomy of civilization/barbarism pops up many other times in different parts of the world and throughout the history of mankind, and it was almost always related to some type of centrism of the other: Hellenic, Roman, Islamic, Chinese, American, and the centrism of many others who identified themselves as the pivot of civilization while the rest were labeled as barbarians. Eurocentrism differs from other types of centrism in that over the last two centuries, it has embodied the power pivot that Europeans were trying to legitimize, expand and uphold, and also that they practically ruled over the entire world in the historical memory of many past generations.

Eurocentrism is thus a nationalist centrism that acquired special meaning under the world's power structure in the past and present. The manifestations of euro centrism are diverse and often accepted as a *fait accompli* that calls for no further evidence. One example is the theory of the «European Miracle» in which Europe's ascension is attributed to its current economic and political position. However, it must be recognized that economic and cultural changes in Europe in the post-Renaissance era played a crucial role in shaping the modern world.

Geographical maps have been used throughout recorded history. The north-eastern part of Europe (usually Britain) is located at the center of such a map. This theory supports the determination of the longitudinal baseline that passes through Greenwich in London. It is universally recognized as the Greenwich line that determines the zero degree. In geographical terms and in particular in the science of cartography, all parts of the world located outside this longitudinal line belong either to the east or to the west, and so on. As such, it represents the diving line between the Eastern and western hemispheres. In such a map, Europe, and no other continent (say, Australia), is the center of the world.

Thus, the Middle East is relatively close to Europe, and the Near East is far from Europe. Usually, the term 'West' refers to Western Europe. History textbooks often contain lessons on Europe and the United States only and reserve a perfunctory treatment for events that took place in Asia, Africa and

Latin America, as if these regions did not exist in history, even when they were the subject of European colonization.

Teaching the history of science and technology begins from ancient Greece, progresses to Rome and then comes to halt at the Middle Ages, picking up again from the Renaissance and the industrial revolution, but fleetingly mentioning the achievements of Chinese scientists and ancient Egyptians, Indians and Muslims. The discovery of the notion of natural elements, for example, is almost always attributed to the Greek, though there is a similar, much older, theory among the Chinese.

The history of mathematics is also taught with a focus on Europe, failing to take into account major contributions to the development of mathematics in other parts of the world, particularly in India, China and the Muslim world. Case in point, the whole world uses Arabic numerals without mentioning it.

University modules on the history of political, social and philosophical thought cover Aristotle, Foma Akvinski, Kant and Marx, but are most often silent about Confucius, Buddha, Avicenna, and other eastern figures.

A brief history of the 18th century would include different dates, events and political figures from many countries in Europe, as well as a quick mention of the invasion of China, the Mongol Empire in India, or the Ethiopian Christian era. After all, more than half of the Earth's population has lived in Asia throughout history.

As mentioned earlier, the history of science and technology is taught in many Western educational systems beginning with ancient Greece, although Greek classical literature laid the foundations and provided a framework for the social, political and intellectual climate in modern Europe. Many indicators point to the fact that most Greek academies if not all of them suffered from Hellenic centrism. Philosophy, history and political theory were often overlooked and not taught to the well-educated societies that had undertaken research that contradicted the discoveries of renowned Greek schools and even worse, in some cases declared them as lies or errors, until the Greeks themselves reached the same conclusions. This aspect was written about by many, especially the Jewish thinker Joseph Flavius who lived in Alexandria in the first century AD.

A century later, not many changes had occurred in the academic environment. Yet, by the end of the European dark centuries⁽⁷⁾, scholars had to fall back on Arab and Persian cultures and on the Asian culture in broader terms to preserve Greek heritage and make advances in science and technology. This was defined to a large extent by the nature of the European Renaissance which was later perceived as a complete return to both the classical Hellenistic thought and its prejudices. Yet, classical Hellenic thought had largely been lost in Europe but it remained preserved in the East which inevitably infused it with some oriental flavor when it returned to Europe.

The notions of European superiority became clearly evident with the onset of European colonization which evolved slowly starting the 16th century. Its positions were further strengthened in the 17th and 18th centuries, reaching their peak in the 19th century. Britain, France and the Netherlands, each in its own way, took the lead among countries in the 17th century. These states had been presiding over the modernization process at an early stage, as pointed out by T. Parsons.⁽⁸⁾

Contempt towards the East seemed to gradually replace admiration, and if Descartes, Voltaire and Adam Smith saw in the Orient a source of inspiration to a large extent, Montesquieu's evaluation was rather negative though he tried to piece together the fragments of progressive ideals and innovations into different models for the states, starting with ancient documents from China, the Arab world and then contemporary Britain. Modern literature considers that he paved the way for the regrettable tradition of underestimating the East's contribution to the development of the world's social order.

(7) The Dark Ages are a period in European history believed to have started in the year 476. Some history schools date its end at 1000, while others lean more towards the beginning of the Renaissance Age. This however does not mean that progress ceased entirely during that time. All major schools concur that the foundations of the modern world were developed in the Middle Ages, from the judicial system to the multinational state, and from technologies to romance, with the exception of market economy which first emerged in the Middle Ages (although the Roman Empire's heritage should not be underestimated).

(8) Talcott Parsons: *The Structure of Social Action*, 1997, page 77.

However, the main shift in public opinion occurred during the era of industrial revolution and colonial invasions, i.e. towards the beginning of the mid-19th century, mostly thanks to such thinkers as Hegel and his successors among such supporters of universalism as Marx. Until then, the original theories of Western superiority had received a significant amount of vindication from Hegel who developed the theory of universal history. It was in reality a European history where the rest of the world was seen as objects rather than subjects in the historical process. For Hegel, Asia and Africa were «static, despotic, and irrelevant to world history”, as Edward Saïd⁽⁹⁾ pointed out.

Hegel applied this reasoning particularly with regard to India where British occupation was seen as an inevitable stage in a process of «evolution». Reading through Hegel's works, it is apparent that he based conclusions such as this on the rather warped assumption that India has no history, although Indian history is rich in events, innovations and achievements, and of course a lack of accuracy as was the case with Europe. Another fact is that if the worth of Indian civilization were to be recognized, it would very difficult to justify the exclusion by British colonialism of India. Hegel's views left a profound mark on world history as they consolidated Marx's ideas, and the recording of human history in general.

For Karl Marx, Europe's place at the heart of the world to understand world history did not necessarily mean a profound European distinction, but he did assert on many occasions that Europe had created a model for the entire world. Marx described the rest of the world as dependent on the «Asian industrialization road». He posited that India was trapped in a stagnant, unhistorical economic state in which «Oriental despots» wielding absolute power governed unchanging, stratified villages. His analysis was flawed by grave ignorance of the actual economic history of India, and of the numerous underlying causes behind its decline. Regardless of the situation, the absolute Eurocentrism vis-à-vis the 'Orient' led to a total reversal of positions towards the East. Prominent thinkers such as Hegel and Marx were at the root of tradition in humanities and social sciences where a comparison is drawn between «us» the progressive and 'them' the traditionalists, and this continues to exist even today.

(9) Edward Saïd: *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, New York, 1993, p. 168.

In fact, the advanced state of European culture often clashed with that of fishing, cattle breeding and nomadic farming communities in the world's remote areas, discovered by Europeans in both North and South America and a large part of Africa, the Pacific and Australia, in particular. However, it is important to note that such attitudes quickly spread to more complex civilizations which were perceived back then as backward compared to Europe, and frequently described as stagnant.

For many European authors, Europe's history became a measuring stick for the rest of the world. Other cultures were defined by the evolution stage that Europe had experienced at some point, such as hunting/gathering, agriculture, early civilization, the feudal system and, finally, the most advanced stage of contemporary liberal capitalism, as only Europe had been able to reach that final stage. Europe was seen as the custodian of the contemporary world's scientific, technical and cultural achievements. Furthermore, the scientific models put in place to properly understand the world replaced religious evaluations and speculation specifically in Europe.

Thus, the philosophy of science was not immune to Eurocentrism since the premises of the scientific revolution were the same as those of 17th century Europe, considered as the basis of the 19th century industrial revolution that, in turn, ignored the scientific achievements made in other parts of the world. The extent to which science can be considered «European» remains a controversial question, even today. Suffice it to mention the known historical works produced in this regard, such as "***The Secret of World History***" by Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), ***A Study of History*** by Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) composed of 12 volumes in which he describes the rise and fall of twelve civilizations and the "interrupted development" of five other civilizations. Other examples include ***The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*** by William McNeill, first published in 1963⁽¹⁰⁾. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim was the first to draw a parallel between the «organizational» and «automatic» patterns of social organization. German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnie shed

(10) Arnold Toynbee: ***A Study of History***. London: Oxford University Press, 1961 (1934); William H. McNeill: ***The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community***. Chicago University Press. 1963.

light on how natural it was to shift from a traditional society to a contemporary one by drawing parallels between clan organization and society. Early in the 20th century, Max Weber was looking at the European logic as an essential ingredient for the success of the West in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalist* (1905-1904). According to this postulate, Europe has exceptional internal characteristics that have allowed it to excel over other civilizations in terms of logic, and thanks largely to Weber. This view which accepts the inevitability of European supremacy (destined for the rest of the world) continues to prevail not only in Europe and the United States, but also in the intellectual circles of other regions.

At the end of the 19th century, the theory of European superiority and racial supremacy merged and spread widely, conferring legitimacy on slavery and other forms of political and economic exploitation. It was used more than once to justify genocide. Furthermore, it accompanied the creation of settlements, outposts and colonial administrations throughout the colonial era in America, Australia, Africa and Asia. As a result, large segments of the population (in many cases the majority) in America, Australia and New Zealand see their origins in Europe, and for this reason, Europe-focused history is taught in these countries and the population is still being raised along the lines of what can be termed the Western European tradition.

According to a prevalent opinion among European theoreticians, the European tradition is not just any tradition since it proposes the European identity through its undeniable achievements in philosophy and methodology as its general mission. Thus, German philosopher Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology claims that *"The prevalent view of most modern Western scholars is that European tradition is not simply one cultural tradition among others. The European self-identity is predicated upon its distinct achievements in philosophy and pure theory, and as such, has a unique global mission to fulfill. Europe alone can provide other traditions with a universal framework of meaning and understanding. They will have to Europeanize themselves, whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, will never, for example, Indianize ourselves. The Europeanization of all foreign parts of mankind is the destiny of the earth."*⁽¹¹⁾ A special, Europe-focused

(11) Rajiv Malhotra: *Eurocentrism of Hegel, Marx, Monier Williams, Husserl*. The Infinity Foundation, 2001.

interpretation of the problem of mutual influence among national cultures when various countries not only emulate their neighbors, but also their technical innovations, economic models, political and social systems, cultural patterns etc., as well as other models, and when the «Great Wall of China» does not divide cultures, including social, economic and political cultures. If transformations occur in one part of the world and close or distant neighbors find these transformations appealing, the borrowing process will occur in some form or the other. When a movement begins in the northwest corner of Europe (as Talcott Parsons said), it transforms the traditional society into a contemporary one in order to transfer the momentum of this movement to other regions.

The modernist theories to which economists largely contributed were prevalent in sociology between the two great wars. Economists were drawing parallels between Western modernization and other «traditional and local» cultures. The famous American economist Walt Rostow is one of the most active proponents of modernization and describes the Eurocentric progression from a traditional society into a post-industrial one in his book «*The Stages of Economic Growth*» (1959). During the Cold War period, Talcott Parsons who helped increase Weber's popularity in the United States, set a distinction between Western social patterns «in general» and the «individual societal patterns» of other cultures. Anthropologist Robert Redfield drew a comparative and defined the shift from the traditional «population» to the contemporary urban society as a transition, and also discovered the possibility of co-existence between «lower» and «upper» civilizations. It must be noted that the positive is always attributed to Europe while the negative is attributed to others. Towards the end of 1998, David Landes tried in his book «*Wealth and Poverty of Nations*» to persuade readers of the superiority of the European culture⁽¹²⁾. Let us now review the evidence presented by contemporary euro centrists in some degree of detail.

David Landes claims that Western civilization and its spread⁽¹³⁾ was a key factor in the progress achieved during the last millennium. The reason, according

(12) David Landes: *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why some Are so Rich and some Are so Poor?* New York, 1998.

(13) Landes: Op. cit., p. 513.

to him, is that it was the Europeans who discovered organized economic development despite its direct correlation with the emergence of new technologies. Landes refers to three intangible and unique manifestations of European culture that determined Europe's disposition to economic growth:

First is what confers great meaning on the development of science as an independent approach to intellectual research that has been able to free itself from the social constraints imposed by organized religion, as well as from the political constraints of central authority. Despite language and ethnic diversity of peoples in Europe, which diversity, according to him, played a major role in voyages into the Atlantic in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Europeans used a unified communication medium which was Latin. The convergence of the public and the private allowed the development of a free discourse through which it was possible to study the environment and deliver the findings to the rest of the Europeans. Despite the absence of a unified political center for Europe, the invention of the press played a crucial role in this.

Second, Landes expanded on Max Weber's claim on the value of work, initiative and investment. But unlike Weber, he accorded little meaning to logic. From the point of view of Landes, there was a sense of work, preservation, integrity, patience and perseverance⁽¹⁴⁾ and the only way to economic success, whether for individuals or for the country, is through hard work and the ability to spend less than the income generated invest the rest in industry. This is the basic answer to the question: why have some rich countries come so far today while some poor ones are where they are? For historical reasons, and not racial or hereditary factors or special intellectual capacities, the Europeans set out on this path, and these are precisely the roots of their prosperity. We must bear in mind that contrary to other researchers from the same school⁽¹⁵⁾, Landes did not mention private property.

Third, and most importantly, Europeans have the ability to learn and apply new knowledge, Landes says. They harnessed the Chinese and Muslim expertise

(14) *Idem*, p. 523.

(15) See: North and Robert Thomas: *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*. Cambridge University Press, 1973.

in manufacturing gunpowder. This ability sets them apart from the countries that systematically rejected information from other cultures, a practice that was rather common in Landes' in 18th century China and a number of modern Arab countries for example (a rather controversial claim, *M.A.*).

Landes also departed, in his own way, from sound reasoning when he said that if one group had the power to remove another class to access some gain, it would do so. He also concluded that through the technical progress they reached, Europeans were able to acquire some cultural values that imbued these countries with enough power to impose their sovereignty over other peoples, sometimes in an extremely brutal way. In the process, many peoples fell victim to European violence, yet they continue to waste a great deal of energy with paltry results in the postcolonial period, which energy can be directed to productive action and investment. Landes' advice to them is very simple: stop fighting and start working. This is particularly important since there is no eternal success, and no concessions are granted indefinitely. Trade interests will never be equal. Finally, different societies have a different response to market signals, which leaves some hope for developing countries but also alerts wealthy ones that their turn soon may come, hinting at the possibility of a decline in Europe.⁽¹⁶⁾

Landes not only mentions the fundamentals on which modern Europe based its transition to modernity, but also refers to the role of the church in medieval times. Similar to other authors before and after him, Landes sums up his evidence with the argument that Europe's predisposition for economic growth is related to the old notion of private property that the Church was able to defend despite the objections of medieval rulers.⁽¹⁷⁾ The notion of the special role played by that the church in medieval times was not unique at all⁽¹⁸⁾.

(16) Landes: *Op. cit.*, pp. 63, 434, 522.

(17) Landes: *Op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

(18) All contemporary authors who addressed Europe's role in the development of the economy have to start from the ideas of Max Weber. They recognize the validity of his ideas on the role of Protestant ethics in the emergence and development of capitalism, referring to his philosophy on the role of the Church in the development of European economic ethics in general, and more broadly European values and institutions. Weber thus wrote that the ancient period of hostile relations with the world led, in most salvation religions, to the

American scholar David Gress, who criticized the glorifying narrative of European history, proves in his work that freedom is an abstract principle that can be tracked through the whole span of European history, from ancient Greece which managed, thanks to the church, to preserve it. However, the relationship between freedom and church evolved very slowly, not as an ideological fait accompli for «the classical world» but as a set of practices and institutions that served the interests of power and illustrated the church's independence in the Middle Ages.⁽¹⁹⁾ Another author, Deepak Lal, considers that individualism of which the evolution is linked to the church in medieval times, is the key element in the West's ongoing economic success story.⁽²⁰⁾

development of internal logical ethics directed at religious values within the community as a means of salvation. The Church did not contribute to the development of capitalism and the establishment of democratic institutions as much as they contributed. When groups were formed on purely religious grounds, the primary cause of conflict was family unity. There is no doubt that the vast majority of religions have provided a definition of worldly relations. It was a fact that the savior, the apostle, the priest and the brother had to become closer to the believer than his own relatives. This increased the seriousness and depth of awareness of the purpose of salvation. Christianity gradually became the only great religion able to overcome the disintegration of family and tribe and to claim universalism. The ethics of religious brotherhood gradually developed within the religious community. Traditional ethical principles such as the «neighborhood association» were first harnessed in the rural population association, members of the family, the production line, participants in military campaigns, sailors and fishermen. There were two primary principles at play here: first, the dualism of external and internal ethics, second, for internal ethics, it is easy to «to do unto you as you do unto me». The economic impact of these principles is: a brotherly helping hand when a calamity befalls morals within the community.» At the same time, as the scope of modern economic capitalism expands, the intellectual connection with the ethics of Christian brotherhood draws closer to the impossible. The brotherhood becomes more and more impossible as capitalist economy higher in logic and thus less personal.» Temples and monasteries have become hubs of rational economics everywhere while monks themselves refuse to enjoy material gains: Salvation religions continued to monitor with little faith the development of the old economic forces that lacked personality and were the enemies of religious brotherhood. Their position on business was for long summed up by the motto «Deo placere non potest» (Latin for «He cannot please God».) They were afraid to cling to material wealth and bounty despite the rationale of salvation. Puritans considered any secular activity as a service to God (the political will of God), as they put it themselves.

(19) David Gress: *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and its Opponents*. New York, 1998.

(20) Deepak Lal: *Unintended Consequences: The Impact of Factor Endowments, Culture, and Politics on Long-Run Economic Performance*. Cambridge, MIT 1998.

Another modern American author, Craig Clunas, addresses the problem from a slightly different angle. He points out that the tendency of Europeans to quantitative thinking, as well as important progress factors such as the invention of pornography as an expression of predilection for a certain types of images, the aspect of nutrition, the new understanding of social trust and overseas colonization.⁽²¹⁾ Jacques Barzun mentions other cultural elements that influenced the ascension of Europe in the past five hundred years such as abstraction, analysis, emancipation, primitivism, secularism, self-awareness and individualism. Barzun is convinced that the West presented to the world a set of ideas and institutions that had never been discovered before.⁽²²⁾ It is clear that the status of the individual within society takes a forefront position. From ancient times, the European civilization has been based on a certain social contract between rulers and ruled. This social contract can be found in Solon's reforms, the laws of Lycurgus, the Twelve Tablets of ancient Rome, in the root of power distribution in ancient democracy and in modern times, in the theory of social pact and in Western political practice in general. Naturally, the components of such a social contract can be found in other civilizations, but only in European civilization have they acquired permanent status⁽²³⁾, as says T.F. Skurodomvat as she rehashes different theses, and that is theory prevailing in terms of modern philosophy. In addition, researchers point to values such as personal freedom, freedom of action and the political sovereignty of each people, as well as the right of nations to self-determination, freedom of social choice, etc. These claims move from one work to another and form the nucleus of the largely ambiguous European ideology of distinction.

Today, Eurocentrism sums up its new form in how pro-free trade West is trying to showcase its ethics to all mankind, promising at the same time that the Western model will bring about wealth and prosperity to the poorest people.

(21) Craig Clunas: *Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West. The American Historical Review*. Vol. December 1999, pp. 1508-1509.

(22) Jacques Barzun: *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Culture Life*. New York, 2000, p. XY.

(23) T.F. Skurodomvat: *European Civilization and Universal Human Values*. Readings were in: KRSO. 22/4/2004. Public and National Humanism in Philosophy, KRSO Conference. (27-28 April 2004), lecture material, edited by I. Ivanova, Bishkek, 2004, p. 185.

Social science has largely contributed to the emergence of Eurocentrism. It developed in five countries: France, Britain, Germany, Italy and the United States. Even today, and despite the extensive spread of social sciences, the largest and most active group of sociologists is made up of Europeans. Social sciences emerged in response to European problems when Europe was trying to assert its sovereignty over the world. There was thus no avoiding the reflection of this in the choice of subjects and the way in which European theory and characteristics were to be fundamentally formed. From the very beginning, sociology acquired a centrist character in Europe and has maintained it throughout its academic history, from the moment social sciences were instituted in colleges in universities.

Emmanuel Wallerstein monitors five key manifestations of Eurocentrism in social sciences.⁽²⁴⁾ These were often analogous, which prevents their clear and definite separation for the following reasons:

1. History recording attributes Europe's present European superiority to singular European achievements. There is no doubt that during the last two centuries, Europeans have found themselves at the top of the world. The wealthiest countries and military might were located in Europe. Europe was also behind the invention of the most advanced technologies, and these facts are not debatable, nor did anyone ever question them. This explains its singularity in terms of impact and standard of living compared to the rest of the world. The Europeans differed from other peoples in innovative values firstly. This what authors hint at when they speak of the European Miracle⁽²⁵⁾ since that is where the industrial revolution took place. They were the first to initiate modernism, capitalism, bureaucracy and personal freedom. At the very least, this is the official opinion though it fell short of explaining the Europeans' ability to specifically create a "Brave New World."

(24) Immanuel Wallerstein: *Eurocentrism and its Avatars: the Dilemmas of Social Science*.
Mail to: lwaller@binghampton.edu.

25 E.L. Jones: *The European Miracle: Environment, Economics, and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Academic instinct drives researchers towards their predecessors and towards pre-European history stages in search of explanations for European achievements.

The history of global sociology reflects this perception of reality to a large extent, although it has become debatable in recent decades. European inventions are being criticized in the search for misrepresentations and inaccuracies in the image of European development in the 18th and 19th centuries. The choice of the pre-European takeoff⁽²⁶⁾ is also controversial. Another way is to extend the period under study from several centuries to millennia. From this angle, the achievements of the 16th and 19th centuries would do not seem to be momentous, nor would all achievements be attributed to Europe alone. Yet another way is to recognize the true facts of inventions. In this case, the question that will take center stage in the discussion will be: should these achievements be considered positive or negative?

History recording of this kind has a cumulative effect. At a certain moment it may become effective, and the opposite theory prevails. There is no doubt that we are coming close to a record movement in the writing of the history of modernity.

2. Universality is a perspective on the existence of equal scientific facts in meaning, regardless of time and space considerations. European thought has been marked by a strong claim of universality over the past five centuries. Science replaced philosophy as a prestigious form of knowledge and of controlling the social discourse. Newton's science is built around the proposition that the world is governed by coercive laws in the form of equal linear processes. When we prove such rules as general equations, we need additional knowledge of a set of pre-conditions so as to be able to predict their state in the future or the past.

(26) Vassilis Lambropoulos mentions in his study of ancient scholars in spiritualism, art and Judaism (Mind and Ethics). Cf. Vassilis Lambropoulos: *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation*. Princeton University Press, 2001. Other authors refer to the Romans, the Vikings, merchants, Jews, Arabs, free Hellenics, etc.

European sociology was clearly universalist because it emphasized that what was unfolding in Europe between the 16th to 19th centuries was a possible model for any other place, either because it was an achievement of human progress that cannot regress, or because it embodied a satisfaction of Man's basic needs by removing industrial impediments to their achievement. What we see today in Europe is not only good, but also reflects the future of other parts of the Earth.

Such theories were attacked, citing the argument that some situations at specific times would not fit the models on the ground. There were always scholars who claimed that a universalist generalization is impossible, and criticism of this kind became systematic during the last three decades, arguing that Universalist theories are not universal at all but are a mere showcase of Western historical models that claim to be universal.⁽²⁷⁾

Sociology was accused of Eurocentrism, as well as of unilateralism. This was received painfully since contemporary sociology is particularly proud of having overcome bias. This accusation seems logical to a certain extent, as no universal postulates applicable to all cases were put forward.

3. Civilization: European civilization does not consider itself as one of many «civilizations», but a unique civilization or at least more civilized than others. Yet, the vision of civilization varies greatly even among Europeans themselves. Civilization represents «modernity» for some, i.e. technological development and higher productivity rates, as well as belief in historical development and progress. For others, civilization means the higher autonomy of an individual vis-à-vis other social role players: family, society, government and religious institutions. For some more, civilization means behaving with no lack of manners in everyday life, that is, social behavior in its broadest sense. To others, civilization means reducing the scope of legal violence and a broader definition of cruelty. And of course, civilization means for many people a simultaneous blend of all these properties in different ways.

(27) Joseph Nechim wrote a while ago about the original sin of Eurocentrism and how it is manifest in the premise that modern science and technology which originated in reality in Europe during the Renaissance have a universal character and are the origin of everything that is European.

Down the centuries, the concept of «civilization» (in singular form) was used as a rule to indicate a high level of social development, especially compared to other peoples and countries. In the 19th century, when French colonists talked about their civilizing mission they meant that France, or Europe in general, would be able, through colonial conquest, to impose on non-Europeans values and assets to which applies the above-mentioned definition of civilization. The idea upheld was that the European civilization was unique, compounded by the notion of the civilizing role that Europe would play towards the rest of humanity. Such ideology, in its developed geopolitical forms, morally justified the sovereignty of European countries, their economic and military expansion and the different forms of colonization. Then in the 20th century, and as a result of two world wars and the disintegration of colonial empires, Europe's supremacy in international relations weakened. Reflecting on the destiny of «civilizations» took prime position on agendas and is now a common subject. Notwithstanding this, some Western scholars and politicians began once again to speak in 1990s of the «right of intervention» in non-western situations. They also labeled this as a «civilizing mission» to the values of civilization that assert the right to intervene, including human rights, democracy, etc....

There is a set of values commonly known as the values of civilization, i.e. secular and human values as well as the modern values related to sociology, as the product of the same historical system that produced these social values and elevated them. Sociologists introduced these values in their definitions of social and intellectual phenomena; introducing the principles they were resorting to in analyzing problems, as well as the criteria they were using to assess these principles. At the same time, sociologists insisted that they were trying to remain neutral in terms of values, afraid of being accused of wrongfully interpreting and deliberately manipulating information to suit their social and political choices. But neutrality in values in this sense does not mean the absence of values in decisions related to the historical sense. This is the evidence put forth by Heinrich Rickert (1913) on the logical characteristics of what he termed «cultural science». This science cannot ignore «values» given the strength of their presence in sociology. When a question is raised about the origin and formation of civilizational values, the conversation usually revolves around the modern western world, and the

answer is almost always that they are the inevitable product of unique and long-term orientations in Europe's past, and an alternative to describing them as the legacy of the ancient world and/or the medieval Christian eras, or a blend of Judeo-Christian heritage.

However, this is not the only controversial point. There are serious objections to the succession of postulates. A question is raised about the civilized state of today's world, including the European one, as well as how this term is used in the European discourse. Another question tackles the assertion that the values of ancient Greece or Rome were more suited to the formulation of modern values than other ancient civilizations. Finally, and that is doubtful, is it permissible for modern Europe to declare Greece and Rome as its own civilizational foundation? In fact, a group of historians considers that Greece had different cultural roots.

More specifically, is Japan entitled to adopt the old Indian civilization as its ancestor since the latter gave birth to Buddhism which became a pivotal part of Japanese cultural history? Is the affinity of the modern contemporary states with Greece and Rome greater in a cultural sense than that of Japan with the Indian civilization? In the same vein, is it possible to claim that Christianity not only stands for a lack of continuity, but a total break away from Greece and Rome? For a long time, Christians were presenting this particular evidence. During the Renaissance, for example, the zealous friar and preacher Savonarola tried to persuade the residents of Florence that all calamities befalling them were caused by the refusal to break away from Barbarism (savagery) including that of the Old World. Is the break away from the old World not part of the theory of Christian churches?

These are not hollow questions since the values' dilemma has occupied an important place in political conflicts and theories. In all cases, when the notion of modernization (i.e. following the European path to a large extent) became popular in third World countries, the debate on values took up central position in European countries as well as in the United States, manifesting itself in a debate around the problem of «multiculturalism».

4. Orientalism: the concept of orientalism usually means the identification of non-Western civilizational characteristics in a technical and abstract manner. A parallel was drawn between orientalism and the theory of «civilization»

and it became a prime subject since the publishing of the writings of Anwar Abdel Malek in 1963 and Edward Said in 1978⁽²⁸⁾. The roots of Orientalism as a branch of knowledge can be traced back to medieval Europe when some thinkers among Christian monks set the goal of better understanding non-Christian religions through the study of Oriental languages and proper good reading of religious texts. They were, of course, animated by faith in Christianity and their desire to convert the pagans to it. However, they earnestly studied those texts as an expression, albeit perverted, of human culture as they thought.

The transformation of orientalism into secularism in the 19th century did not lead to changes in the format of Orientalist activity. Orientalists continued to study eastern languages and to decode texts. A dual view of the social world persists despite the fact that the Christian/Pagan dichotomy has turned into one of West/East and «novel/traditional» societies. Based on this, societies were divided in modern sociology into military and industrially-advanced societies (the *Gemeinschaft*) and the *Gesellschaft* (society) (according to Tenés, M.A.), and the mechanical and organic solidarity, logical laws and the static and dynamic characterization of development. Despite the absence of a permanent correlation between this division and orientalist literature, we must not forget that from the very beginning there was a comparison between the exigencies of the situation and tradition, and it was in essence the collision between the Hindu and the English rights systems.

Orientalists were ordinarily proud of their admiration of non-western civilizations, although their understanding had a social structure developed by people who belonged to an extraneous culture. The suitability of these structures was specifically criticized at least at three different levels: 1. Principles that are not suitable for empirical realism, 2. they were exceedingly abstract and allowed experimental diversity and, 3. they represented the extremism of European bias.

(28) Anouar Abdel-Malek: *La dialectique sociale*. Paris: Seuil, 1981; Edward Said: *Orientalism*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

The criticism of Orientalism was mainly directed at the political repercussions inherent to the spread of such theories in social science. Orientalism, as Orientalists claim, provided a legitimate reflection of Europe's compelling sovereignty, and indeed played a key role in the ideological justification of Europe's experimental role within the modern world system. Efforts to destroy the narrative nature of social sciences were accompanied by an attack on Orientalism, but a suitable alternative has yet to materialize.

5. Progress: We explained earlier that progress served as the basis of European enlightenment. Some scholars observed that this notion has been present throughout the history of European philosophy.⁽²⁹⁾ At all events, progress in Europe was considered a de facto matter throughout the 19th century and most of the 20th century. Thus, sociology as a European invention abounded with the concept of progress.

Progress as the primary justification for the history of the world provides a logical representation of most progressive theories. In addition, it almost becomes the basis of all applied sociology. Development metaphors are not just attempts to describe reality; they are also recommendations to remove the impediments to progress, thus making sociology a policy advisor (designer) starting with Bentham's Panopticon and ending with modern social policy. After the Second World War, advancement of underdeveloped countries became a chapter that conferred legitimacy on the activity of sociologists from all political leanings and was geared to reorganizing the non-western world.

There were always some critics of the idea of progress among conservatives. After 1968, critics of the concept of progress gained in power, especially within the circles of conservatives and "Neo-leftists." Thus, a number of researchers consider that what is normally meant by progress is the wrong type of progress. Other authors consider that there is no progress at all, either in view of the «original sin» or of internal human development cycles. Others admit that some progress did take place in Europe and that it is now reaping its fruit from all around the world. This is the opinion of some non-western environmentalists, for example.

(29) J.M. Bury: *The Idea of Progress*. London, Macmillan. 1920. Robert Nisbet: *History of the Idea of Progress*. New York, Basic Books, 1980.

In general, it is possible to perceive a tendency towards symmetry between the idea of progress and the «European idea» because such trend is often criticized by Eurocentrism. The picture will only be complete once we mention the efforts of third World scholars to present progress as the expulsion of Europe from one part or the entire non-western world while retaining the idea of progress for themselves.

Starting in the second half of the 20th century, a new opinion emerged in Europe and elsewhere contending that European civilization is one of the local civilizations that have been interacting through exchanges for thousands of years and now coexist with each other. Incompatible and often contradictory social values became a criterion for difference. The many anti-Eurocentrism theories for interpreting world history have attempted to justify cultural and social pluralism and the plurality of the world's representations.

Thus, in recent decades, an alternative European viewpoint has evolved imposing a more attentive view to the achievements of Asian civilizations. After World War II and the emancipation of Asia and Africa from colonialism, the formation of a political awareness of the non-European world grew and impacted global cognition and policy processes. As a result, Eurocentrism became the target of severe criticism during the past 30 years. Clearly, the progress of social science is only possible through overcoming the Eurocentrism that manipulated analysis and imposed constraints on the resolution of the modern world's most critical problems. Hence the need to be conscious of what Eurocentrism gives rise to because, as we will see later, it is a monster with a hydra head. The clear part of this criticism is a refutation of Eurocentrism based on the Europe-focused premises born out of the general errors of the scientific community.

Asian social sciences were discovered in the West, the same as the majority of other sciences, and Asian scholars continue to find in them inspiration, evidence and validation. At the same time, the importance given by scientists and students to recognizing the need for progress in sociology is focused on Asia for a better understanding of Asian reality.⁽³⁰⁾ Yet, most contemporary

(30) *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism*. Ed. By Syed Farid Alatas. New Delhi, Sage, 2006, p. 31.

scholars continue to have a negative view of the demand for an alternative discourse focused on Asia.

These criticisms did not affect Eurocentric knowledge only, but also the historical circumstances surrounding the Europe's ascension and Asia's recession as the two main themes in the historical and philosophical awareness of social processes during the past centuries. Thus, contemporary authors consider that Europe's undeniable prosperity in the 19th and 20th centuries was inevitable and had nothing to do with special qualities of Europeans that conferred this superiority on them. European superiority was not born out of a unique European experience, but was coincidentally short-lived in the historical sense. Renowned philosopher and sociologist James Blaut gathered much information that cast doubts on the celebrated argument of Europe's demographic, environmental and geographical superiority, as well as on the claims about the origins of Europe's religious, philosophical and social success. He argued that the rise of Europe was due to the fortunate coincidence of a favorable geographical situation that allowed it to access gold and silver in North and Latin America and to use them for the colonial trade made possible by these sources.⁽³¹⁾

Blaut's criticism of Eurocentrism was more systematic compared to the subsequent critics, but the theory of A. Frank was much more profound.⁽³²⁾ Frank did not care about Europe itself which from his point of view contributed a little to the consecration of its dominance in the 19th century. In the early stages of modernity, Europe was no more advanced than any other part of the world. Europeans have done nothing themselves without the mention of self-modernization. In other words: Europeans did not create the global economic system in any sense, nor did they develop global capitalism. He adds: "The Europeans had no exceptional, let alone superior, ethnic, rational, organizational, or spirit-of-capitalist advantages to offer, diffuse, or do anything else in Asia."⁽³³⁾

(31) James Blaut: *A Colonizer's Mode of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. New York, 1993, p. 59.

(32) Andre Gunder Frank: *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

(33) Ibid, page 277.

Europe's success was the result of the dynamism of the global economic system that had been formed around or maybe before 1400. As a structuralist, Frank believed that local events take place within the framework of the system of trade relations through which exchanges occur with money and products around the world or as part of intercontinental exchanges⁽³⁴⁾. Throughout the greater part of the past millennium, Asia had been the center of this system, particularly China, as remarkable economic growth was noted during the rule of the Song dynasty. Contemporary American historian Janet Abu-Lughod considers the regression of this system, as part of the world's population decline in the 16th century, left the stage empty for the emergence of a real world order in the post-Columbus era.⁽³⁵⁾

Frank did not agree with this. He believed that the global system operates in line with long ascension and recession cycles. Frank contended that Asia set on an economic ascension cycle around 1400, which cycle lasted until the 17th century. Only when it reached its recession cycle did the European cycle reach its level at around 1815. This means that, unlike other historians, Frank believes that the year 1500 was not a crucial turning point or the beginning of a new era, but the moment of restructuring the global system. It was exactly around that time that Europeans discovered the Western hemisphere.

Frank's theory is supported by a wealth of information on the state of global trade in the 16th and 17th centuries. He mentioned three regions where industry had developed rapidly, namely India, China and South-east Asia, as well as four stagnant regions: Latin and North America, Japan, Africa and Europe. Interactions between failing and thriving regions were limited to European and Japanese imports of spices and African exports of slaves. Europe, which had nothing to sell, was able to offer some raw materials, silver in particular, as the price of silver in China was at least twice its price in Europe or the new world, and represented a quarter to a third of the total

(34) Andre Frank and Barry Gills (eds.): *The World System: Five Hundred Years of Five Thousand?*

(35) Janet Abu-Lughod: *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 125-1359*, New York, 1989.

silver exported from America to China. The Chinese did not manufacture silver coins but foreign silver coins were used there. Frank conclude that these were the roots of European development: Europeans first secured a seat then an entire compartment on the Asian train"⁽³⁶⁾

Frank's tendency to exaggerate is no lesser than that of Landes. According to him, the Asians did not outperform the Europeans but were at the same stage of development in the field of weaponry, ship making, printing, textiles, metallurgy and transportation. Government authorities were then linked to the ups and downs of the economy. Even the Crusades, in his opinion, were no more than Europe's attempt to take its marginal economy into a new Asian-African dynamic.

Contrary to Landes, Frank hardly takes interest in the «human factor». He is fundamentally interested in structures, and in small groups of people, but in humanity as a whole, labeling it humanocentrism.⁽³⁷⁾ This method has of course a right to exist, after all, global industrialization is no more than a second in the extensive stretch of history. Yet, I think that this theory is un-human: cycles follow each other, structures emerge and then disappear, but even the people themselves unfortunately disappear from such a layout.

The world was predominantly agrarian until 1800. The clear part of material wealth hinged upon agriculture. The rest was also produced by people living in rural areas. The standard of living in Europe and other parts of the world was equal. The economy was developing in two correlated directions. First, the direction of expansionary development thanks to an increase in agricultural land and, in many cases, through increased agricultural production. Secondly, in very rare cases, development progressed through the increase in labor productivity with the intent of increased market exchanges. When the market scope expanded, task allocation evolved and the individual was kept active in the most profitable way for him just as he was allowed to improve his financial condition. Adam Smith noted this dynamism before but it was present everywhere.

(36) Frank: *ReOrient*, page, 277.

(37) Frank: Op.cit, page 293.

The British anthropologist Jack Goody considers that many of the characteristics often attributed to Europeans are not in fact exclusive to Europe.⁽³⁸⁾ Goody believes that the basic Eurasian cultures, or at least those in the Mediterranean Basin, India and China, have evolved on the basis of similar inventions from the Bronze Age. In fact, commercial activity used to flourish periodically in different regions, and developments processes in their broadest sense were greatly similar in the entire Eurasian continent.

In the late medieval period, cultural life was slowly flourishing in the West in monasteries. Note was also taken of the flourishing culture in Muslim hubs in Spain, Egypt and Persia. And that is where independent science prospered and where communication was established with other civilizations, Near Eastern ones in particular. These are some examples of the East's achievements in science. The Muslim mathematician Ibn Hazm was the first to record that light travels in a straight line and discovered the principles of light reflection and refraction. In so doing, he laid down the cornerstone of optics. The Persian Omar al-Khayyam contributed to the development of Algebra (classification and resolution of second and third-degree equations) and reformed the calendar. The first medical encyclopedia in history was written by the Muslim doctor al-Razi in 20 volumes and he was the first to describe smallpox accurately, which helped the Chinese develop a vaccine against it shortly after that. The Muslim and Persian philosopher, doctor and physicist Ibn Sina published his famous opus Canon of Medicine. Arabs and Muslims in general have contributed significantly to astronomy and mathematics... etc.

In the 7th century, black gunpowder was invented and porcelain was made for the first time. The Chinese imperial authorities produced paper money for the first time in 1024. Chinese prisoners taught Arabs how to manufacture paper, which method reached Europe later on.

Between 1500 and 1700, Japan morphed into one of the world's most urbanized societies. The two main driving forces behind this development were the expansion of trade and the spread of political power over greater expanses. In economic terms, the city of Osaka was the most advanced and

(38) Jack Goody: *The East and the West*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

hosted the ship making industry enabling overseas exports. At the end of the 18th century, local hubs emerged specializing in the manufacture of silk and oil for lamps, and the soya union began its activity. The following step was the economic specialization of some regions and the extension of commercial transactions to rural areas. However, the trends witnessed in Japan were not unique in Asian countries.⁽³⁹⁾

Similar operations were taking place in the 16th and 17th centuries in South-east Asia. Cities with ports were growing rapidly, new borrowing systems were put in place, and silver became a currency in circulation. Traders were acquiring growing political clout as their wealth increased. Market transactions were reaching the countryside, opening a broader world before peasants. Fernand Braudel described similar phenomena in South Asia in the 18th century.⁽⁴⁰⁾

In China, the trading revolution led to the regulation of markets, the formation of transport networks, and the preparation of market transactions in the 10th century. Then another trade revolution wave unfolded in the 16th century. By the end of this century, trading hubs began to emerge in China to trade in cotton, silk and rice products, as well as salt, fish, bamboo, wood, ceramics, mineral products, tobacco, vegetable oil, writing tools and carriages. This was taking place in the mid and eastern parts of the country where modern day Shanghai is located. The commercial character of life had acquired a very broad scope.

Labor was rented for wages on the long or short terms, and the lands of peasants were sold and bought. Furthermore, lease transactions were multiple, but the bulk of wealth redistribution was still happening within families. Loaning for trading purposes was actively practiced. In scientific literature, these financial institutions of different types existing back then were called local banks. The first appeared in 1736 as the depository and borrowing bank that financed Russian-Chinese trade.⁽⁴¹⁾

(39) R. Wong: *The Search for European Differences and Domination in the Early Modern World: A View from Asia*. The American Review, April 2002, Vol. 197. No. 2, page 2.

(40) Fernand Braudel: *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme*. Volume 2, Exchange Games, Moscow, Progress, 1988.

(41) Wong: *The Search for European Differences* ... page 10.

Our knowledge of the Chinese market's activity in the 17th and 18th centuries is far less than what we know about European markets, for example. However, the development of markets in China led also there to the development of specialization in work. High labor productivity rates not only meant a larger quantity of goods manufactured daily but also a reduction in the number of holidays. At the same time, it meant the development of agricultural and craft technologies. The similarity with Europe is particularly noticeable since both effective and ineffective market institutions existed here and there.

With regard to expansion into new lands with demographic growth, certain differences can be noted. European colonial expansion favored the creation of colonies overseas. Thus, Europeans created two types of economy in America: 1) the economy of white immigrants, which largely imitated the trends, traditions and agro-industry techniques common in Europe, and 2) an economy based on plantations and African slaves. The Chinese first expanded beyond their land borders in the north-western and southern directions, and later on in the north-eastern one. Common practices in the least developed regions of China were employed in the new regions. Fung saw that differences in manufacturing methods were due to a specific exchange rationale. The development of exchanges in China continued according following the logic of Adam Smith, i.e. through the distribution of work by region. The opening of borders led to the start of trading relations at varying degrees of intensity with the central and economically productive regions⁽⁴²⁾. The political logic of European colonies overseas was quite different. The interests of the colonizer prevailed first and foremost. Products were manufactured in the colonies that the colonizer would have had to buy from rival states. Colonies also became a market for the products of the old colonial economies. The colonies located more to the north resembled Britain itself while southern ones were exploiting slave labor. Trade relations were often closer between them than with Britain itself. In addition, they often developed for political rather than commercial reasons. As a result, the colonies became highly independent of the colonizing states and turned into their potential competitors. This is

(42) Ibid, page 14.

exactly what happened when they decided to become fully independent and founded the United States of America.

Materialism was predominant in Europe and resulted in a strong relationship between power and wealth. According to these theories, the prosperity of society can be reached through industrial growth in the most important regions and the development of trade throughout the country and abroad. Thus, the interests of merchants and rulers converged in terms of supporting national productivity and economic unification to sustain a relatively low level of wages and returns on savings, and to ensure maximum land use.

At the international level, the key objective was to maintain a positive trade balance, which would increase the flow of money into the country, necessary for waging wars. A state is considered successful when its income is higher than its expenditure. This represented a bit of a gamble: if one country was winning, another one was losing, and thus being competitive internationally became an important element in the formation of a country in Europe. This led to the State's support for the businessmen who contributed to strengthening its position in the international arena. Overseas expansion was carried out by different institutions, sometimes by businessmen, other times by the state and sometimes as a joint venture. The modern classical economic system was surrounded by two extreme poles: piracy and monopoly, especially in tea and pepper. The armed forces supported it⁽⁴³⁾ while the law protected the right to private property in European states. Meanwhile, coercion and exactions were widely carried out overseas.

We seem to be reaching the core subject of all the discourses criticizing Eurocentrism. Why in the end was Europe able to take off, and not China or India? This seems to be the platform of confrontation between the proponents and critics of European superiority. For Jill Stokes, the stumbling block in this controversy was the naval expeditions conducted at the beginning of the 15th century by the powerful Chinese eunuch mariner Zheng He.⁽⁴⁴⁾ His

(43) Wong. Op.cit. page 18.

(44) Gale Stokes: *The Fates of Human Societies: A Review of Recent Macrohistories*. The American Historical Review. 2001. Vol. 106. No. 2, p. 18.

fleet consisted of 317 ships (the Spanish fleet in 1588 had 130 ships and its length was 85 feet). His army was composed of 27,000 individuals the largest fleet ever assembled before the 20th century⁽⁴⁵⁾. The Chinese carried out seven major naval expeditions in the Indian Ocean until they arrived in Madagascar, but in the end, due to internal political disputes, the emperor ordered the destruction of the ships. The situation further deteriorated until a ban was imposed on the construction of ships with more than two masts. Naval expeditions thus ceased, and Europe no longer had any competitors in the sea.

Is this a coincidence or the result of a wrong decision by the Chinese emperor? Researchers admit that the problems run much deeper and are more complex. Eurocentrists proposed a number of arguments of a political, economic, religious, cultural and geopolitical nature in defense of the nature and legitimacy of Europe's "take-off".

(45) Louise Levathes: *When China Rules the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne*. 1405-1433, New York, 1999.

British Orientalist Karen Armstrong: Loving Admirer of Islam and its Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Dr Ahmed Abou Zaid*

Karen Armstrong, a British religious sciences scholar residing in the United States of America, is one of the fair voices defending Islam, its prophet and civilization in our times. She is one of the prominent authors, researchers and orientalists who have heeded the voice of reason in their perception of the Muslim Orient and its religion and civilization. She has delivered many lectures and wrote about Islam and the West in modern history. She continues to travel around the United States of America and Europe, delivering lectures, giving interviews and writing articles in defense of Islam, refuting allegations and dispelling misconceptions about this religion and its prophet.

Armstrong is also a most renowned contemporary religious and comparative studies researcher. She was appalled by the common stereotypes circulating about the Prophet of Islam in the West since the Crusades, and undertook an in-depth study of the Middle East, its religions, cultures and history. She also wrote a number of books where she addresses major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), seeking out their points of commonality as well as those of their aspects that impact world history and steer its course. She is famous for her strong and emotional response to Pope Benedict when she said: «*We cannot afford to maintain these ancient prejudices against Islam.*»

Regarded by some as audacious, daring to challenge the vindictive Crusader legacy that surrounded her in her childhood, particularly since she had

* An author and thinker from the Arab Republic of Egypt. The text is a chapter in his new book *Al-Istishraq al-Nissai: Qissatu Hadhara fi 'Oyoun Gharbiyya Monsefa* (Female Orientalism: A Tale of civilization through Fair Western Eyes», published by ISESCO, Rabat, 2017.

turned to convent life in her youth, a life that tends to exacerbate the sentiment of hostility towards the Other in general, and Islam and Muslims in particular. While others know her as the runaway nun who escaped life in the monastery, not to rid herself of interest in religious matters, but to embark on the very same path but through research in comparative religions, she became one of the most important presenters of the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to her Western society. This importance is not justified by her scholarly and academic background, but extends to the reasons that propelled her to write about the life of Prophet Muhammad, most important of which was her desire to provide the Western reader with a clear view that is usually shrouded in mystery and folkloric haze, of a man who was a human prophet...who changed mankind's history and continues to serve today as a source of inspiration to more and more people.⁽¹⁾

In one of her media interviews, she spoke openly as she admitted her sense of shame before the European silence about the denigration that Islam and Muslims are subjected to and urged European and American governments to immediately engage a serious dialogue with Muslims to better understand the truth about Islam, far from the contents churned out by Western media in the way of distorted images of this great religion. She also blames Muslims for failing to acquaint the West with the greatness of the Islamic religion through actions and not words only. Through her writings about the life of Muhammad (PBUH), she hopes to help the West understand Islam that she sees as rapidly growing across the world.

We are interested here in her works which testify to her genuine concern for objectivity and fairness, in extents that are rare and exceptional in the West, particularly at the current juncture when the tides of hatred have been rising high since the collapse of the Communist enemy, only to be replaced by Islam and Muslims as an avowed enemy in the eyes of the two extreme segments of Western society, the religions and the non-religious!.⁽²⁾

(1) Dalia Yusuf, Karen Armstrong: *The Runaway Nun*. Weghat Nazar website, December 2006: http://www.weghatnazar.com/article/article_details.asp?id=1023&issue_id=70

(2) Muhannad al-Khalil on Karen Armstrong's book «*Muhammad*»: *a former nun freed from her shackles*, Sudansite, Sept. 17 2012, in: http://www.sudansite.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4854:-qq--&catid=30&Itemid=147

The beginnings and intellectual formation

Karen Armstrong is a British-born Irish-American academic specializing in comparative religious studies. She was born on 14 November 1944 in England to a family of Irish origin. She joined the Society of the Holy Child Jesus as a novice nun from 1962 to 1969 as part of her schooling. Then she was sent to St. Petersburg's College at Oxford University, where she studied English literature. But after spending seven years as a nun, she decided to leave the monastery, admitting that she could not meet the demands of the monastic life she had chosen and that she described as constrained and providing little experience in her book «Through the Narrow Gate». She invited the wrath and hostility of many British Catholics despite the fact that her book was topping the bestselling charts in Britain.

In 1976, she became an English teacher at a girls' school and served there until she left teaching in 1982 and began working, in 1984, in the production of a six-part documentary series on the life and work of Saint Paul, commissioned by Channel 4 in the United Kingdom. These documentaries pushed her to research, once again, the subject of divine Religions. She took a profound interest in the three Abrahamic religions which she had begun to study in the seven years she had spent at the monastery. The impact of the documentary did not stop at this point as this assignment necessitated her travel to Al-Quds several times, and there she began to raise questions to the people she worked with. In Al-Quds she heard her Israeli hosts refer to Arabs and Islam in the most contemptuous terms and could not believe it, she who had been raised denouncing the horrors of the Holocaust. She wondered: How could people who had endured persecution be involved in this kind of racism? She described her shock at hearing the Israelis not only defending the killing of young powerless people but also justifying it. All this alerted her to the possible existence of another side of the story and when visited the Muslim areas of Al-Qods, she realized that something had been intentionally omitted in Europe, and perhaps also in America, and that the Middle East and Islam needed to be presented properly after all the distortions that had tarnished the pages of their history in the West.

She then decided to further explore divine religions, and as she pored over Islam she was astonished to find it worthy of study and reflection and totally different from the Islam portrayed by Western media.⁽³⁾

Her writing career then began, largely focused on comparative religions. When she visited Al-Qods in 1996, she gained insight that altered her positions as she began to know Islam as she had not read about it before. At that time, in 1996, she published her book: *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. She wrote in the *Guardian* that the sufferings of Muslims in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Palestine provoke solidarity in view of Islam's strong emphasis on solidarity and justice, and that as a result of the West's preoccupation with the so-called clash of civilizations, this internal tension is often overlooked.⁽⁴⁾

Following her visit to Al-Qods, Armstrong faced a profound dilemma. She was concerned that her new consciousness was beginning to shake her faith in all that she had experienced and the harmonious Western culture and value system she was raised in. She said: «*We were posing as a tolerant society, yet passing judgment from a position of extremes and irrationality.*»

It was at this time that Armstrong began to pursue what she described as the new wisdom, and to re-examine Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Up until then, her spiritual and intellectual resources were the Church's teachings and the traditional tributaries of Western media and academia. She pointed out that all of these portrayed Christianity and Judaism in a better light, while projecting negative images of everything Arab or Islamic.

This explains Armstrong's focus on her own Western civilization's audience, seeking to provide them with a better understanding of Islam and its prophet. She combed libraries, read the works of comparative religions' schools, and

(3) Iyad Abdallah: British thinker and nun Karen Armstrong to Al-Madina: *The majority of Europeans do not understand the nature of Islam*. Al-Madina newspaper, Jeddah, Ar-Rissala Supplement, Issue: 18510, 8 November 2013, in: <http://www.al-madina.com/node/489668?risala>

(4) Abdulrahman Abu al-Majd: *Karen Armstrong: Hal Heya al Aqrab ila al l'tidal?!* Alukah internet network, June 1, 2010, in: <http://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/22282>

attended seminars to unlock a profusion of research treasures and valuable works. Yet, she could not find anything to suit the ordinary reader who did not grow up within the folds of the Islamic culture. This prompted her to present the Islamic religion and the life of the Messenger (PBUH), in a manner that would best suit the ordinary Western reader's mind.

One of the events that encouraged her to write the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the case of Salman Rushdie and his book *The Satanic Verses*, which was received with an outpour of rage from Muslims who perceived it as an insult to the Messenger and his household. And while Armstrong abhorred the fatwa issued by Imam al-Khomeini authorizing the killing of Salman Rushdie and his publisher, she was at the same time annoyed by the way the Salman Rushdie affair had been dealt with in England. She says: *“Up came all these neo-crusaders defending the cause of free speech, but from a standpoint of ignorance. They were protesting against the burning of the Satanic Verses as if the Christians had never ever set fire to books with which they disagreed. I was forced to ask my friends why the blasphemy laws in England only applied to Christianity.”*

It was in the midst of such hypocritical qualms and an atmosphere of intellectual turmoil in England that Karen decided to write a biography of Prophet Muhammad especially tailored for the Western reader. At that time, she believed that with a revival of religion on both sides of the Atlantic, Judeo-Christian tradition now had to deal squarely with the third Abrahamic faith: Islam.⁽⁵⁾

A rich literary production

The biography of the Messenger (PBUH) was not the only field in which this researcher wrote. She achieved distinction through many other books, writings and valuable studies which addressed Islam, its history, civilization and comparative religions.

(5) Dalia Yusuf: *Karen Armstrong: The Runway Nun*.

One of her books *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*, published in 1988, achieved great acclaim and record sales. In this book, she discussed the history of the Crusades and the Middle East conflict in modern times. Then she wrote *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* in 1991, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* in 1993, *Jerusalem: One city, Three Faiths* in 1996, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* in 2000, *Islam: A Short History* in 2000, *Faith after 11 September*, in 2002, and *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* in 2006.

She also penned *The Bible: A Biography* in 2007, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* in 2006, *A Short History of Myth* in 2005, and *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* in 1996. Other writings include *The End of Silence: Women and the Priesthood* in 1993, *The English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century* in 1991, *Tongues of Fire: An Anthology of Religious and Poetic Experience* in 1985, *The First Christian: Saint Paul's Impact on Christianity* in 1983, and *Through a Narrow Gate*, in 1982.

Through many of these writings, Armstrong took it upon herself to rectify the image of Islam in the West by shedding light on the true image of our Prophet. Western culture has a long established tradition of Islamophobia, dating back to the times of the Crusades. Through the Church, a perception was promoted within Christian circles during the 12th century of Muhammad (PBUH) as an imposter who imposed his religion on resisting people by the force of the sword, describing him in the vilest terms... Since the 9/11 events, this onslaught has been ongoing on many fronts, all considering Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a terrorist with a predilection for war, so much so that these stereotypes have bit accompli in the West.

In contrast, Armstrong argues that Muhammad (PBUH) was never a man of violence, but a beacon of light in today's world. To achieve these results, she proposed that his life be addressed in objectivity and moderation in order to justly evaluate his significant achievements. His life was an unrelenting campaign against greed, injustice and arrogance. His greatest pursuit was to change the hearts and minds of people, and he never attempted to coerce people into religious belief.

These notions are defended by Armstrong as she addresses aspects such as the Meccan call, pre-Islamic times, jihad, and peace. The importance of her studies is measured by the great success of her books in the West, especially in Britain and America. Her position vis-a-vis the Prophet (PBUH) and Islam is almost unique at times characterized by the systematic denigration of the person of the Prophet (PBUH) and of the Islamic Charia.

“Muhammad... Biography of the Prophet”

Looking at her writings about Islam and its Prophet (PBUH), we come across her book *Muhammad... A Biography of the Prophet*. This book is of great value and achieved much renown, becoming very popular at the time of its release in 1991 as the latest orientalist books chronicling the life of the Prophet. It was reprinted several times and its sales in the United States alone in the month following the New York bombings (Sept. 11, 2001) reached a quarter of a million copies. It was translated into Arabic by Dr Fatima Nassr and Dr Mohamed 'Anani. Another translation was carried out by Muhammad al-Joura under the title «*Islam in the mirror of the west... A new attempt at understanding Islam*».

The book is a study carried out and published by the author at the peak of the waves of hatred and hostility towards Muslims and Islam that erupted in the West after the publishing of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The author found inspiration for her own book on the Prophet (PBUH) in the Muslim outcry about this book, the West's exaggerated welcome of *The Satanic Verses* and its disdain for the sentiments of Muslims. It proves with irrefutable and clear evidence that the root of the hatred, enmity and violence prevailing on the international scene lies in the West's hegemony over peoples and individuals... And that this hatred is primarily owed to the misconceptions disseminated by ill-intentioned parties that plot to entrench division and bring about a fracture in relations between Islam and the West.

The researcher asserts in this book that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance and refutes the accusations directed at the Prophet (PBUH) by Western racist fanatics such as British author Salman Rushdie, the Zionist orientalist Bernard Lewis, Martin Kramer and others... She sheds light on the genius of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and sees the Prophet (PBUH)

as a man raised as an orphan and who lived like any other human being, a simple and humble man who had faith in his message, remained loyal to his mission and followed the path of the truth, then quietly left this world, having achieved an unprecedented miracle. He did not die on the battlefield, seated on a throne or regal in imperial pomp. After his death, he lived on in human conscience through his lofty teachings which laid the foundations of peace, concord and human justice, and set out to fulfill the greater good of humanity.

The book primarily targets the Western audience and not the Arab Muslim reader. But its importance for us lies in the fact that that the author's vision proves that for an author to persuade others he must first be convinced. He will not be persuaded unless he has the opportunity of an objective vision. In turn, this objective vision is only achieved if the person rids himself of all prejudices and preconceived notions and purged the remnants of his or her upbringing and the obstacles raised by the individual and collective subconsciousness.⁽⁶⁾

The book serves as a scientific purge of all the factors of hatred nurtured by the author's own people towards Islam. In fact, prior to the rise of the Soviet Union in the previous century, the West had never been confronted to a continuous challenge equal to the challenge it faced from Islam and Muslims.

The Westerner cannot forget that when the Islamic State came into existence fifteen centuries ago, Europe was still wallowing in the depths of backwardness. The Islamic conquests quickly spread to most parts of the Christian world in the Middle East and the Maghreb. The defeat was a painful blow to the Crusader project in the 12th and 13th centuries. Then Europe was further surprised to find that Islam had reached its heart from another gate, through the Ottomans.

The author believes that as a result of the bitter defeat and fears, Westerners are unable to show objectivity when it comes to the Islamic faith, and have therefore painted a distorted image of Islam, mirroring their own underlying

(6) *Al Habib fi 'Uyun al Mostashriqin al-Muncifin*, Karen Armstrong, on:
<http://www.Muhammadalnabi.com/oyoonmostskrken/20.html>

concerns. The problem was further exacerbated in modern times as Muslims began, for the first time in their history, to nurture strong hatred towards the West, this being a logical reaction to the European and American moves in the Islamic world during the despicable eras of colonialism.

Armstrong continues her well-judged distinction between Islam and the practices of some of its followers. She provides evidence that includes the detention of Shiites in Lebanon as Western hostages, antagonizing people in America and the West against Islam itself, unaware that such actions are contrary to the relevant texts and laws enshrined in the Qur'an on taking prisoners in times of war and their treatment. Unfortunately, the media do not present accurate information. Another glaring example is the biased Western media coverage of Khomeini's fatwa on the killing of Salman Rushdie. These Media ignored the majority who opposed this fatwa in the Islamic world, particularly when prominent scholars in Saudi Arabia and Al-Azhar in Cairo declared it as invalid. In fact, Islamic law does not allow the death penalty without trial, and its judicial power does not extend beyond the Islamic world's borders. During an Islamic conference held in March 1989, forty-four out of forty-five states rejected the *fatwa* of al-Khomeini's *fatwa*.

The spirit of fairness that is clearly manifest in the writings of Armstrong has incited her to extend many invitations to her people many times to learn about Islam from its original sources, far from ready-made judgments, and to engage in dialogue with Muslims in all rationality and respect.⁽⁷⁾

The book is in its entirety an attempt by the author to bring about justice and fairness for Islam and its civilization and to reveal its essence to people in the West who are the victims of an intellectual propaganda aimed at distorting Islam in their minds.⁽⁸⁾

(7) Muhannad al-Khalil: *Karen Armstrong's book «Muhammad»: a former nun freed from her shackles.*

(8) Muhammad Musa'ad Yaqout: *Al Akhlaq al-Nabawiyya fel Sira'at al-Siyasiyya wa al-Askariyya*, Jeddah: Dar al Kharraz, p. 165, posted in: www.nabiallahma.com

Muhammad the Man of al-Lah

To read some parts of this book is to truly appreciate the degree of integrity and fairness that characterize this orientalist. As she studies the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), she says in the second chapter of her book:

«Muhammad had great spiritual as well as political gifts - the two do not always go together - and he was convinced that all religious people have a responsibility to create a good and just society. He could become darkly angry and implacable, but he could also be tender, compassionate, vulnerable and immensely kind. We never read of Jesus laughing, but we often find Muhammad smiling and teasing the people who were closest to him. We will see him playing with children, having trouble with his wives, weeping bitterly when a friend dies and showing off his new baby son like any besotted father. If we could view Muhammad as we do any other important historical figure we would surely consider him to be one of the greatest geniuses the world has known. To create a literary masterpiece, to found a major religion and a new world power are not ordinary achievements... We cannot understand his genius unless we appreciate what he was up against»⁽⁹⁾

Under the heading **«Muhammad the Man of al-Lah»**, she says in the same chapter: *«Muhammad had political gifts of a very high order; he had entirely transformed the conditions of his people, rescued them from fruitless violence and disintegration and given them a proud new identity. They were now ready to found their own unique culture and Muhammad's teachings had unlocked such reserves of power that within 100 years, the Arab's empire stretched from Gibraltar to the Himalayas.*

If this political feat had been Muhammad's sole achievement, he would have a claim to our admiration. But his success depended upon the religious vision that he had communicated to the Arabs and which was adopted with alacrity by the subject people of the empire, clearly fulfilling a deep spiritual need. Muhammad and his first Muslims did not achieve their triumph easily, as is sometimes imagined. They were engaged in a grim, desperate struggle

(9) Karen Armstrong: **A Biography of the Prophet**. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

and unless the religion had come first with the Prophet and his closest companions, they would not have survived. Throughout these years of danger, Muhammad believed that he received direct inspirations from God but he also had to use every talent he possessed. Muslims were aware of their Prophet's exceptional ability and were conscious that he had changed the course of history.»⁽¹⁰⁾

The author then proceeds to comment the manner in which Muslim historians have been writing the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), as compared to the approach of Western historians as they addressed the biography of Jesus (peace be upon him) and the history of Christianity. Once again, her opinion can only be described as extreme when she says: *«These historians are not relying simply on their ideas but were attempting a serious reconstruction. They include earlier documents in their narrative, trace oral traditions back to their original source and, though they revere Muhammad as a man of God, they are not writing uncritical hagiography.»*

«Ibn Sa'd and Ibn both include traditions and stories that are not wholly flattering: in particular Muhammad's wife Aisha was an outspoken woman and her sharp comments about her husband are scrupulously recorded. From these biographies which are confident enough about the quality of their subject not to indulge in whitewash, we get a compelling and realistic portrait of this extraordinary man.

Naturally these early biographers were not writing in the same mode as modern Western historians. They were men of their time and often include stories of a miraculous nature which we would interpret differently today. But they are aware of the complexity of their material and the elusive nature of truth.»⁽¹¹⁾

Then she says: *«...But these gospel accounts are quite different from the early biographies of Muhammad by the Arab historians. They are more*

(10) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

(11) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

concerned with the religious meaning of Jesus' life than with the historical facts and frequently express their needs, the preoccupations and beliefs of the early churches rather than the original events. The Bible narrative, is quite different from the walk written by Arab historians, the Book of Bibles has given me the religious significance of the life of Christ, more than their attention to the narrative of historical facts, and crosses these writings are often about the needs, interests and beliefs of the first churches, rather than on the narrative of the original events. New Testament scholars, for example, point out the Gospel accounts of Jesus' passion and death are hopelessly confused; facts have been changed....very few of the actual words of Christ have been recorded."⁽¹²⁾

Noble morals

In the 9th chapter, she writes about the personality of the Prophet (PBUH): "Indeed, Muhammad himself set a high standard of 'brothering' in his own behavior. The man who was becoming increasingly fearsome to his enemies was deeply loved within the umma, which despite the constant danger it faced seems to have been a very happy community. Muhammad refused to put a gulf of formality between himself and the other Muslims. He hated to be addressed with pompous, honorific titles, and was often seen sitting unaffectedly on the ground on the mosque, frequently choosing to sit with the poorest members of the community. Children were especially drawn to him . He was for ever picking them up and hugging and kissing them. When he had been away on an expedition, it was customary for the children of the umma to go out and meet him when the raiding party returned and they would lead him into the oasis in a triumphant procession. If he heard a baby crying in the mosque during Friday prayers, he nearly always brought the prayers to an end earlier than he had intended to: he could not bear to think of the distress of the baby's mother.

The laws formulated in the Qur'an sound ruthless to us today, but the Prophet himself was known to be lenient."⁽¹³⁾

(12) Karen Armstrong: *A Biography of the Prophet*. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

(13) Karen Armstrong: *A Biography of the Prophet*. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

Then she says: *“Over the centuries in the West, we have tended to think of Muhammad as a grim figure, a cruel warrior and a callous politician. But he was a man of great kindness and sensibility. He loved animals, for example, and if he saw a cat asleep on his clock he would not dream of disturbing it. It has been said that one of the tests of society is its attitude towards animals. All religions encourage an attitude of love and respect for the natural world, and Muhammad was trying to teach Muslims this. During the jahiliyya, the Arabs had treated animals very cruelly; they used to cut off lumps of flesh while the beasts were still alive and put painful rings around the necks of camels. Muhammad forbade any painful branding or organized animal fights. One tradition has him telling a story in which a man who gave water to a dog on a thirsty day was sent to paradise and a woman who starved her cat to death was sent to hell. The preservation of these traditions shows how important the values have become in the Muslim world and how quickly the community had advanced toward a more humane and compassionate vision.”*⁽¹⁴⁾

Islam is a real-life religion

In the tenth and final chapter, she writes under the title **“Death of the Prophet?”**: *“Islam was a practical and realistic faith, which saw human intelligence and divine inspiration working harmoniously side by side. By the year 632 it seemed as though God's will was really about to be done in Arabia. Unlike so many of the earlier prophets, Muhammad had not only brought individual men and women a new personal vision of hope, but he had undertaken the task of redeeming human history and creating a just society which would enable men and women to fulfill their true potential. The political success of the umma had almost become a sacrament for the Muslims; it was an outward sign of God's invisible presence in their midst.*

Instead of wandering in worldly fashion round the hills of Galilee preaching and healing, like the Jesus of the Gospels, Muhammad had had to engage in a grim political effort to reform his society, and his followers were pledged

(14) Karen Armstrong: **A Biography of the Prophet**. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

to continue this struggle. Instead of devoting all their efforts to restructuring their own personal lives within the context of the pax Romana, like the early Christians, Muhammad and his companions had undertaken the redemption of their society, without which there could be no moral or spiritual advance.»⁽¹⁵⁾

Then she adds: *“After Muhammad's death, the continuing success of the Muslim venture vindicated the political effort, and seemed to demonstrate that if a society was reorganized according to God's will it would prevail. The Arab armies had quickly established an empire which spread from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees... about a hundred years after Muhammad's death the caliphs did begin to encourage conversion and people began to flock into Islam, proving that the Qur'an answered a religious need for the people of the Middle East and North Africa. It was able to assimilate the wisdom of other ancient cultures and quickly established its own distinctive cultural tradition.”⁽¹⁶⁾*

“Muhammad is therefore seen symbolically as the Perfect Man, the human archetype and the image of a perfect receptivity to God. Hence the imaginative importance of the belief in Muhammad's illiteracy, because it displays his total openness to the Divine word: this, like his Night Journey, is seen as a perfect example of that ‘Fana or annihilation in God of which the Sufis speak.”⁽¹⁷⁾

The researcher concludes her book with these words: *“If Muslims need to understand our Western traditions and institutions more thoroughly today, we in the West need to divest ourselves of some of our old prejudice. Perhaps one place to start with is with the figure of Muhammad: a complex, passionate man who sometimes did things that it is difficult for us to accept, but who had genius of a profound order and founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword -despite the Western myth- and whose name, ‘Islam’ signifies peace and reconciliation.”⁽¹⁸⁾*

(15) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

(16) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

(17) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

(18) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

A cold war against Islam

There is no doubt that this book assumes its relevance from the time it was released in. The book was published at a time when Islam was the target of a vicious cold war, or as the author stated, it seemed that a cold war against Islam was about to replace the cold War that had been waged against the Soviet Union.

This book not only gives due justice to the prophet of Islam (PBUH) but also improves the ordinary Muslim's knowledge of his religion. The author reviewed the history of the West's animosity towards Islam and its Messenger in the Middle Ages, which animosity was fuelled by political motives. The West painted a mental image of the Prophet (PBUH), or «Mahound», and projected everything they hated on him and on Islam. This hate took body in by Salman Rushdie's ***Satanic Verses*** that vindicated all those repulsive portraits of the Prophet. The *fatwa* on killing Salman Rushdie revived the old European perception, particularly after the escalation of radical terrorist massacres. All of this motivated Karen Armstrong into writing this great book and asserting as she did at the end of her book that the West needed to let go of its old grudges and come closer to understanding the character of Muhammad (PBUH) who "*had genius of a profound order and founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword –despite the Western myth- and whose name, 'Islam' signifies peace and reconciliation.*"⁽¹⁹⁾

It becomes clear as we progress through the book's chapters that to understand Islam and the Prophet's biography, the author relied on the Holy Qur'an and old historical sources such as Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saad and al-Tabari. She linked Qur'anic scriptures and traditional texts to the conditions prevailing at the Arab Peninsula. She drew comparisons between these sources and the Christian and Jewish heritage. This was part of her endeavors to bring the human face of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) closer to the Western mind and to correct the West's misconceptions.

(19) Karen Armstrong: ***A Biography of the Prophet***. Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1991.

She pointed out the rationality of Islam did not give rise to any contradictions between scientific research and the religious frame of reference as had happened in Europe. This rationality had helped create a body of knowledge among Muslims that influenced Europe in the Middle Ages despite its declared animosity towards Islam and Muslims.

The author applauded some facts of Islam that the West is ignorant of, such as the rights of women and their equality with men, and Islam's human and economic justice. She defended Islam and the prophet on aspects that the West misunderstood such as the Prophet's polygamy and that of Muslims, and jihad and warfare in Islam. She also defended Islam and the Prophet against some of the grave misrepresentations reported in heritage, such as the killing of prisoners from Ibn Quraidha and the marriage of the Prophet to Zeinab Bint Abi Jahsh. She also cast doubts about the story of the Gharaniq which served as inspiration for Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*.

With a clear and rational vision, she grasped some of the Islamic truths contained in the Holy Qur'an that remain beyond the reach of the majority of Muslims, such as the definition of Islam as surrendering to Allah alone, feeling whole and fulfilled in the worship of Allah alone, the people of the Jahiliyya times having known Allah but associated other gods with Him.

Words of admiration and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) abound in Armstrong's book. She considered him to be the greatest genius in history since he unified all the Arabs around the same faith in twenty-three years while it took the Israelites prophets seven hundred years. He was a paragon of brotherliness, kindness and compassion. He did not limit himself to spreading the word and fostering new hope, but also strived to build a just society. Towards the end of his life, he managed to achieve this miracle after eradicating tribal violence and paganism and bringing the Arabs to a state of readiness for embarking on a global phase.⁽²⁰⁾

(20) Munira Hussein: *Karen Armstrong defends Prophet Muhammad*. 9 January 2009 in: http://www.ahl-ahlquran.com/arabic/show_article.php?main_id=4722

Muhammad: Prophet for our Time

The second book by Karen Armstrong is no less important than her book, *Muhammad... Biography of the Prophet*. It was published in 2006 with the title *Muhammad, Prophet for Our Time*, and was translated by Faten al-Zalabani. Karen explains that this book, which was released 15 years after the first one, was new and entirely different. After the 9/11 attacks, she felt that her first book no longer fulfilled the purpose intended behind it. She perceived a need to focus on other aspects of the life of Muhammad (PBUH) as these events had only aggravated hostilities towards Islam and its Prophet.

This book is similar to no other book written in its time^(*). It managed to have a positive echo among Western intellectuals in general, thus bringing about a full appreciation of this researcher's status and her work. It also managed to shed clarity on a few facets of the greatness of the Prophet (PBUH), for those attempting to dehumanize him.

When the demeaning cartoons of Prophet Muhammad swept across the Danish press, and former Pope Benedict XVI renewed his derogatory comments about the Prophet, the Islamic world was swept by a torrent of outrage in reaction of these malicious forays against the noblest of all human beings (PBUH). In the midst of those storms and dark times a dazzling light shone from the very heart of this multitude, a voice resonating loudly and striking deeply in time: Stop maligning Muhammad, we need him. This light was the book *Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time* and this voice was that of Karen Armstrong, the voice of the truth, one who came to know the secrets of the Prophet's biography and probed its mysteries.

The book consists of five chapters: the first one is on Mecca, the second one deals with the *Jahiliyyah*, the third one on the **Hijrah**, the fourth one on *jihad* in Islam, and the fifth one on peace in Islam.

Through these chapters, the author was able to present her vision of the Seal of all prophets and the extent to which humanity needs his divine message

(*) This book won the ISESCO/OCIS Prize for Educators which was awarded to Armstrong at a ceremony organized by ISESCO on 13 April 2017.

and his human teachings to save the world from the perils of wars that felled million and are about to consume more.

Armstrong considers that the word «*jihad*» does not mean holy war, but rather a struggle to bring peace to the war-torn Arab countries. She stated that Muhammad (PBUH) had immense genius that enabled him to establish a religion inspired by his God, and to establish cultural traditions and customs, not with the force of the sword but with the above-stated values of peace and reconciliation. The author wished there were men, in these times, who acted in the same manner as Muhammad did. And that is why her book was titled ***Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time***.⁽²¹⁾

A world class social reformer

It is clear in this book that the author is in awe of the character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a social reformer of a global caliber who was able to create peace, to unify Arabs and non-Arabs under the same umbrella. This unification was concretized after a time when hostilities were common among human beings in general, and among Arabs in particular and had become deeply entrenched. The author considers that the century in which we live, with its turmoil and unrest, is in the greatest need for Muhammad (PBUH) to bring serenity and harmony to mankind.

By writing the biography of Muhammad (PBUH), Armstrong wished to help the West acquire a better understanding of this religion. And although she believes that the three monotheistic religions carry one and the same message of which the means and objective are to bring about love, justice and happiness for Men on earth, religion, from her point of view, has become a rationale used in the most violent conflicts and hostilities and in blood-letting wars around the world. She noted that Islam was particularly targeted by this hostility. When the Satanic Verses book was released, it was widely welcomed by the West after the Muslims' reactions to it. The Western society became captivated by this book despite its open disdain for the sentiments

(21) Dr Bashir Mahmood Rizq: *Shahidatun min Ahlih*, *Al-Ahram* newspaper, March 6th, 2007.
[Http://deedat.wordpress.com/2007/03/06/%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%](http://deedat.wordpress.com/2007/03/06/%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%)

of Muslims, propelling her to leave the convent in order to fathom the secret behind this hatred for Islam.

In her opinion, the aim of Islam was to build a just society and Muhammad was the first to start this edification. Muslims understood that the Qur'an had entrusted them with a mission, which was to edify a just and noble society, and to treat every individual with respect. For this reason, good political governance was and continues to be a crucial matter. She says: "*The life of the Prophet Muhammad (c.570-632 CE) was as crucial to the unfolding Islamic ideal as it is today. His career revealed the inscrutable God's activity in the world, and illustrated the perfect surrender (in Arabic the word 'surrender' is Islam) that every human being should make to the divine.*"⁽²²⁾

She goes on to say: "*As a paradigmatic personality, Muhammad has important lessons, not only for Muslims, but for Western people. His life was a jihad: as we shall see, this word does not mean 'holy war.'* Muhammad literally sweated with the effort to bring peace to war-torn Arabia, and we need people who are prepared to do this today. His life was a tireless campaign against greed, injustice, and arrogance. He realized that Arabia was at a turning point and that the old ways of thinking would no longer suffice, so he wore himself out in the creative effort to evolve an entirely new solution."⁽²³⁾

Calumny stems from a Christian source

The writer boldly admits: "*We have a long history of Islamophobia in Western Culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades. In the twelfth century, Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, and that Muhammad was a charlatan who imposed his religion on a reluctant world by force of arms; they called him a lecher and a sexual pervert. This distorted version of the Prophet's life became one of the received ideas of the West, and Western people have always found it difficult to see Muhammad in a more objective light. Since the destruction of the World*

(22) Karen Armstrong: *Muhammad, Prophet for our Time*. Harper Collins, 2006. Translated by Faten al-Zalabani, Cairo: Maktabat Al Shorouq al-Dawliyya, 1st edition, 2008, p. 21.

(23) Karen Armstrong: *Muhammad, Prophet for our Time*. Harper Collins, 2006.

Trade Center on September 11, 2001, members of the Christian Right in the United States and some sectors of the Western media have continued this tradition of hostility, claiming that Muhammad was irredeemably addicted to war.”⁽²⁴⁾

Then she says: “*We can no longer afford to indulge in this type of bigotry; because it is a gift to extremists who can use such statements to ‘prove’ that the Western world is indeed engaged in a new crusade against the Islamic World. Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements. To cultivate an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterize Western culture.*”⁽²⁵⁾

Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths

Armstrong’s books, all fair to Islam, its prophet and its civilization, follow one another. In her book ***Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths***, published in 1996, she reviews the history and civilization of the city of Al-Quds in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The book tackles three correlated concepts. The first of these is the concept of sacredness. Man not only perceives this sacredness as a force existing beyond his own entity, but also senses it deep down in his heart. Yet, the sense of holiness, similar to an aesthetic experience, requires fostering and nurturing, a condition that cannot be met in a secular society. Traditional societies, on the other hand, consider the ability to perceive holiness as an important one, and many feel that without the perception of holiness, life would not be worth living.

The second concept is legend. This word has in fact become insignificant in our culture today. It is generally used to characterize what is not true, and that applies to the debate on Al-Quds. Palestinians argue that there are no vestiges testifying to the existence of a Jewish kingdom built by King David,

(24) Karen Armstrong: ***Muhammad, Prophet for our Time***. Harper Collins, 2006.

(25) Karen Armstrong: ***Muhammad, Prophet for our Time***. Harper Collins, 2006.

and that it is probably a mere legend, and the issue of Al-Quds is one of significance because the city has acquired the status of a mythical entity.

The third concept is symbolism. We now live in a science-oriented society and no longer capable of using images and symbols in a natural way in our thinking. We have developed thought patterns that are more logically inclined. Each of these three concepts or currents has had an impact on the long-troubled history of Jerusalem.

The book is an attempt to understand what Jews, Christians and Muslims mean when they say the city is holy to them. It also refers to some of the religious traditions of each of these religions.

Armstrong wrote about the Islamic conquest of Palestine and Bayt al-Maqdiss: "Umar also expressed the monotheistic ideal of compassion more than any previous conqueror of Jerusalem, with the possible exception of King David. He presided over the most peaceful and bloodless conquest that the city had yet seen in its long and tragic history. Once the Christians had surrendered, there was no killing, no destruction of property, no burning of rival religious symbols, no expulsions or expropriations, and no attempt to force the inhabitants to embrace Islam... Islam began its long tenure in Jerusalem very well indeed."⁽²⁶⁾

About the Umari Covenant agreement with the people of Aelia or Bayt al-Maqdiss, she quotes Tabari's account of this document: "*[Umar] grants them security: to each person and their property, to their churches, their crosses, to the sick and the healthy, to all the people of their creed. We shall not station Muslim soldiers in their churches. We shall not destroy their churches nor impair any of their contents or their property or their crosses or anything that belongs to them. Like the other subject people of the Islamic empire, the Jews and Christians of Palestine of Palestine...paid a poll tax (jizyah). In Jerusalem, it seems that each family had to pay one dinar per year... but the*

(26) Karen Armstrong: **Jerusalem. One City Three Faiths**. Ballantine Books, 2005. Translated into Arabic by Dr Fatima Nasr and Mohamed 'Anani, Dar Sotour, 1998, p. 386.

system did enable people of different faiths to coexist in relative harmony. It was certainly a vast improvement on Byzantine law, which, increasingly, had persecuted such minorities as Monophysites, Samaritans, and Jews... 'They did not inquire about the profession of faith,' wrote the twelfth century historical Michael the Syrian, 'nor did they persecute anyone because of his profession, as did the Greek, a heretical and wicked nation.'"⁽²⁷⁾

Christians were allowed to build and restore their churches freely: indeed, during the seventh and eighth centuries there was quite a spate of church-building in Syria and Palestine. The only place where Muslims congregated in large numbers was on their Haram, the old Temple Mount.

There seemed no good reason to deny the Jews the right to live in the City of David. Umar invited seventy Jewish families from Tiberias to settle in Jerusalem: they were assigned the district around the Pool of Siloam at the southwest corner of the Haram... They were also allowed to build a synagogue –known as the Cave–... The Byzantines emperors had outlawed Judaism, and Heraklius had been on the point of forcing Jews to be baptized... Muslims had not only liberated them from the oppression of Byzantium but had also given Jews rights of permanent residence in their Holy City... Toward the end of the seventh century, a Hebrew poem hailed the Arabs as the precursors of the Messiah... Jews continued to look favorably on Islamic rule in Jerusalem. In a letter written in the eleventh century, the Jerusalem rabbis recalled the 'mercy' God had shown his people when he allowed the "Kingdom of Ishmael" to conquer Palestine."⁽²⁸⁾ "Ethnically, the population of Jerusalem remained as mixed as it had ever been. The Muslim conquerors were not permitted to settle down in their new territories. They remained a small military caste who lived apart from the local people in special military compounds. Some of the generals were allowed to build estates, but only in unoccupied territory."⁽²⁹⁾

(27) Ibid, pp. 390-391.

(28) Ibid, pp. 393-394.

(29) Ibid, page 295. Dr Wadie Ahmed: **Muslim Conquerors did not Demolish Churches.** Forum of Dr Ahmed Wadie at: <http://www.dr-wadee3.net/forum/showthread.php?t=829>

The Crusaders and the conquest of Jerusalem

Armstrong then speaks of the Crusaders and their invasion of Al-Quds in the 11th century: *“Popular preachers spread the word and in the spring of 1096, five armies of about sixty thousand soldiers accompanied by hordes of noncombatant peasants and their wives and families set off on the road to Jerusalem. Most of them died on the perilous journey through Eastern Europe. They were followed in the autumn by five more armies of some 100,000 men and a crowd of priests. The emperor had asked for conventional military help and found that he had inspired what seemed a barbarian invasion.*

In the spring of 1096, a band of German Crusaders massacred the Jewish communities of Speyer, Worms and Mainz along the Rhine... It seemed ridiculous to these Crusaders to march thousands of miles to fight Muslims—about whom they knew next to nothing – when the people who had actually killed Christ (Or so the Crusaders believed) were alive and well on their very doorsteps. These were the first full-scale pogroms in Europe; they would be every time a new Crusade was preached. The lure of Christian Jerusalem thus helped to make anti-Semitism.

The Crusading armies which left in the autumn of 1096 were more orderly than their predecessors... Most reached Constantinople in good order... The Crusaders made a good start and they inflicted defeats on the Turks in Nicaea and Dorylaeum... When they arrived in Antioch, they laid siege to this powerfully fortified city during the terrible winter of 1097-98... The Crusaders were ultimately victorious... stood at last before the walls of Jerusalem in 1099...and created two new principalities governed by Western rulers: one in Antioch and the other in Armenian city of Edessa. ()*

... The Barbaric Christians from Europe were known to be utterly ruthless and fanatical in their religious zeal. Many of the Greek Orthodox and Monophysite Christians of Jerusalem, alerted by these alarming tales, fled to Egypt... The a Genoese fleet arrived in Jaffa... The Crusaders systematically slaughtered about thirty thousand inhabitants of Jerusalem...Ten thousand

(*) Known today as Ufa in Southeast of Turkey

Muslims who had sought sanctuary on the roof of the Aqsa Mosque were brutally massacred, and Jews were rounded up into their synagogue and put to the sword. There were scarcely any survivors... They were cold-bloodedly appropriating property for themselves... The streets literally ran with blood, 'Piles of heads, hands and feet were to be seen' says Provençal eyewitness Raymond of Aguilles... Men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of unbelievers since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies. '{They only desire your ruin: rank hatred has already appeared from their mouths; what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made plain to you the Signs if ye have wisdom.}'⁽³⁰⁾... Eventually, there was no one left to kill. The Crusaders washed and processed to the Anastasis, singing hymns... various accounts of the First Crusade which entirely endorsed the belligerent piety of the Crusaders. Henceforth, the Muslims, hitherto regarded with relative indifference, would be viewed as a 'vile and abominable race' 'absolutely alien to God' and 'fit only for extermination'. The Crusade had been an act of God on a par with the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; the Franks had taken up the vocation that the Jews had lost. Robert the Monk made the astonishing claim that the Crusaders' conquest was the greatest event in world history since the Crucifixion. Soon the Antichrist would arrive in Jerusalem and the battles of the Last Days would begin.

The bodies were burnt with great efficiency... But in fact the task was too great, and the bodies were still lying around the city five months later. Overnight, the Crusaders had turned the thriving and populous city of Jerusalem unto a stinking charnel house. There were still piles of putrefying corpses in the streets when the Crusaders held a market three days after the massacre. With great festivities and celebration, they sold their loot, blithely unconcerned about the carnage they had inflicted and the hideous evidence lying at their feet... Most of the soldiers went home, leaving only a skeleton army behind. Jerusalem was particularly desolate... But after the conquest of Jerusalem, the Crusaders promulgated a law banning Jews and Muslims from the Holy City."⁽³¹⁾

(30) Surah Al-Imran (verse: 118).

(31) Karen Armstrong: **One City Three Faiths**. Ballantine Books, 2005.

Godfrey became the ruler of Jerusalem and resided in the Aqsa mosque. He turned the dome of the Rock into a church and the Jewish Temple into a seat of the Pope of Rome. He died of typhoid fever the following year. They buried him in the Church of Refuse that they named the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.⁽³²⁾

Holy war

One of the major books of Karen Armstrong is *Holy War: The Crusades and the Impact on Today's World*.⁽³³⁾ The work comes in a large volume of 709 pages, divided over three main sections in addition to the table of contents. The first part is titled *Journey to a New Self* and comes in three parts that explain the motives of the holy war, then the pre-Crusade era, the West's quest for a new Christian soul, and then the current conflict between Arabs and Jews.

The second section, *Holy War*, includes five parts at the fourth of which the author begins her narrative at the year 1096 and how the Holy War began to give birth to a new form of *jihad*, starting with the campaign of Saint Bernard. It addresses religious *jihad* and secular crusades, and how global Zionism turned into a holy war. Then she cites the murder of Anwar Sadat in 1981, to conclude with part VIII on holy war and peace.

The third section has three parts and an epilogue, then chapter IX begins in 1199 when the crusades targeted Christians and Christian peace.

Chapter X is about the end of the Crusades while in chapter XI, the author starts her narrative from 1300 to present times. She concludes with a three-dimensional vision of a tapestry that covers the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

(32) Dr Wadii Ahmed: *Al-Hamalat al-Salibiyya* from the book *Jerusalem* by the contemporary Historian Karen Armstrong. <http://www.dr-wadee3.net/forum/showthread.php?t=856&s=4dd687d24e9ccf749108ba32a7e790ec>

(33) This book was translated by Sami al-Kaaki and published by Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi in its first edition in 2004.

Karen Armstrong comes to an important conclusion, namely that the West uses the expression “Crusade” under a positive and good light when it should consider the Crusades as the darkest of all eras in Western identity considering its brutality, aggressiveness and cruelty.⁽³⁴⁾

This book tackles the Crusades from a historical angle, and with political approaches from the current reality in a manner that appears to be historical, political, analytical and religious at the same time. It focuses on the conflict between Jews, Muslims and Christians who are all presumed to adhere to the message of a single prophet, Abraham, believe in the prophecy of his descendants, and follow them.

Karen says In this book that in the 11th century, Europe began to experience a state of renaissance and attempts to abolish the sense of inferiority experienced towards Muslims who were more powerful and refined in culture at that time. They set out to build a new identity and had a renewed sense of confidence. The Crusades were essentially part of this process and truthfully embodied this new Western spirit.

The fabrication of an enemy is a key step in the process of developing a new identity. Muslims provided the perfect enemy, although it was clear that until then the Franks had no issue against Muslims and knew nothing of Islam except that Muslims were not Christians and that they were fearsome fighters whose defeat would greatly elevate the Franks' status.

The Crusades were essentially based on anti-Semitism. They started with attacks on Jews and attempts to exterminate them. They were given a choice between converting to Christianity or death. Before the Crusader armies set out for the East, they were busy purging Europe of Jews, the assassins of the Messiah. The Crusaders made non-Semitism an incurable western disease that clung to the West throughout the Middle Ages. When Hitler came to power, he was also killing even those Jews who had converted to Christianity

(34) For more information, cf. Karen Armstrong: *Holy War... The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World*, translated by Sami al-Kaaki, Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, pp. 108-110.

hundreds of years earlier, in revenge for the massacres perpetrated by the leaders of the Crusades.⁽³⁵⁾

The author says: *"It should be clear how Crusading is directly linked to the conflict in the Middle East today. At the beginning of their journey to a new identity, the Crusaders slaughtered Jews; at the end of their long and frightening campaign, they massacred the Muslim community in Jerusalem with appalling savagery...Hatred of Jews and Muslims had been planted deeply in the Western identity."*⁽³⁶⁾

She affirms that the 18th century was an intense nationalist era. The Jew emerged as an enemy to the national identity. In Germany, nationalism was based on people and not on civilization. This perception made Jews an enemy of the German spirit, and in the midst of these feverish atmospheres, it was only natural that the Jews would seek a nationalist solution for themselves. Many early Jewish settlers realized that Jews can only discover their true identity by connecting physically with their ancestral land.⁽³⁷⁾

Then the Zionist movement saw light. The first wave of migration to Palestine had Zionist motives in the 1880s of the 19th century. And when Zionism evolved into a legitimate political movement recognized by many governments and leaders of European states, the initial idea was a national homeland for Jews, not necessarily in Palestine, but that it could exist in the Sinai or in Africa.

When the British took away claimed Palestine from the Turks in 1917, the Palestinians were not officially notified of the Balfour Declaration. The events that ensued from the British occupation of Palestine unfolded as is well documented. Jews began to pour into Palestine until they declared their state in 1948. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homeland, their villages were destroyed and erased from existence, to

(35) Ibahim Gharaibeh: *Al-Harb al-Muqaddassa...al-Hamalat al-Salibiyya wa Atharuha 'Ala l'Alama al-Yawm*. <http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=368936.0>

(36) Karen Armstrong: *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*. Page 113.

(37) Ibid., page 117.

be replaced with villages with Hebrew names. The secular conflict on the ground was once again turned into a religious conflict and a holy war.

The author then speaks of the true motives of the Crusades, asserting that the leading figures of the Crusades headed for the East, such as Godfrey, Crown Prince of the Lorraine who had been defeated by Emperor Henry IV, had no future in the West, so he set out at the command of the first Crusader army, to be recorded in history as the first Crusade ruler of Jerusalem. Bohemond was one of the feudal lords of the duchy of Apulia in southeast Italy and found in the Crusades an opportunity for glory and affluence in the East. Robert of Normandy was the eldest son of William the Conqueror and had failed in his fight with his brother to be the heir to their father's throne. When he returned from the Crusades, his brother put him in prison where he spent the rest of his life. Another figure was Baldurin who had lost all his possessions and failed in his career as a man of the Church. All of these were commanding armies of riffraff who were dreaming only of pillage, looting and riches.

The Crusades were thus associated with personal motives, adventure and Christian ideals, all culminating into these campaigns. Their repercussions and developments brought about a novel state of equality between poor ordinary Europeans and knights and nobles, all becoming equal in the face of hardship, exile and need, thus giving the poor a sense of belonging to the elite. The spoils collected by some of them were of such abundance as to elevate them to the rank of nobles, freeing them from a long and deeply seated sense of humiliation and servitude. The notion of poor Crusaders on a quest for justice and equality was thus reinforced.

When the Crusaders entered Jerusalem, they killed everyone they found on their way, men, women and children, as if they were re-enacting the Israelite account of the entry of Joshua Ben Nun into the same cities and regions two thousand years earlier. The Crusaders' presence was reinforced by battalions of knights who seized castles and forts and set up a special regime, emulated hundreds years later by Israeli settlements and kibbutz.

On the other side, the Muslim historians who wrote about the Crusades portrayed them as economic and expansionist military campaigns and never linked them to Christianity. Yet, Emad al-Din al-Zanki launched a counter-attack against the Crusaders and revived the values and ideals of jihad to bring

Muslims together against the Crusaders. For Muslims, the war shifted from a secular liberation and defense operation to a war mixed with religious karma. The pace of the war escalated with the coming of Mahmoud Nouredine al-Zanki after the death of his father Emad al-Din.

The author asserts that the Jewish holy war follows the same lines as the Christian one, so much so that orthodox Zionists seem to be inspired by and imitating the Crusader model. The Crusades seem to have helped form religious Zionism, in the same way it spawned anti-Semitism.

Redwan as-Sayyed wrote an analysis of this book that was published by the London newspaper Al-Hayat. We deemed it relevant to quote some paragraphs of this analysis:⁽³⁸⁾ *“Karen Armstrong begins her study with known facts that can be summarized in the invitation by Pope Urban II to Christian knights in 1095 to set out for the Orient to liberate Jerusalem from the grips of Muhammad's followers, and save the Byzantine Christian State from the onslaught of the Turks (Seljuk) who had laid claim to large swathes of Asia Minor and were threatening Constantinople itself. These knights, despite the class disparities that prevailed within the feudal societies of the time, marched for the first time under the command of Christian clergymen sent by the Pope with them. Men of the cloth were not allowed to carry weapons as this was not part of their traditions. However in the grips of immense religious zeal, and over several decades, they developed visions that favored the creation of armed fellowships and a religious dogma took shape around the holy war or the just war and which astounded the Orthodox clergy who met them at the walls of Constantinople, in Antioch and in other parts of the East.”*

“Thus, in the 12th and 13th centuries, and as it waged a tenacious war in successive campaigns, the West was looking for a new soul and sprouting a new awareness that could only be fulfilled through wars waged in the name of Christ, but that were at the same time reshaping the European society and the European church. The war against the Muslims gave birth to wars

(38) Redouan as-Sayyed: *Karen Armstrong wal Harb al-Muqaddasa fil Yahudiyya, al-Masihiyya wal Islam. Al Hayat* newspaper, London, 25 August 2003.

against the Orthodox, and then wars, campaigns and inquisition against the heretics and European dissidents, lasting until the fifteenth century. But the matter did not stop there. In the sixteenth century, when religious wars against Muslims were almost over, Catholic Europe faced two major challenges: the profound internal divide in Protestant Reformation and the Ottoman advances into Europe from end to end after the Mongols, all in the midst of new circumstances and novel concepts."

"This vast panorama which oscillates between the historical display of military movements and the historical development of religious, secular or governing ideas, is parallel to another panorama that reveals the conditions and beliefs of Muslims, their modes of behavior since the start of the Crusades and until the Ottoman invasions. There is a somewhat exaggerated focus on the Muslims' warfare doctrine, and a continuous reference to the Qur'an and the early history of Islam. But there is also an insistence on the fact that the jihadist spirit was not very strong among the Muslims on the eve of the Crusades and until the days of Nouredine and Salah Eddine. Muslims were astounded by the brutality shown by the knights and monks, a shock and surprise equally noted among the Byzantines whose fear of the Crusaders was no less than the Muslims' fear."

This wealth of information derived from Christian sources (the Old Testament in particular), and Islamic ones (the Qur'an), and from the history of the conflict and its literary references (the writings of priests and others who were part of the campaigns, the writings of Muslims soldiers of Salah Eddine and others like Ibn al-Atheer and Abu Shama) are what brought the author to a «reasonable» explanation of the fundamental Christian hatred for Islam, even more than a century after the end of the Crusades. Even those who had read the translations of the Qur'an by both monks and laymen, and even those who had enjoyed good treatment from Muslims despite their cruelty and massacres against them, continued to consider Muslims as Christian heretics or pagans. Having pondered this matter from all its angles, the author comes to the conclusion that the greatness and historical triumph of Islam, its successful challenge of Christianity in ideology and history were and continue to be the reason behind this enmity.

Battles in the name of God

To her rich list of works, British Orientalist Karen Armstrong added *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*⁽³⁹⁾ in which she tries to explore the phenomenon of fundamentalism, the conflicts that accompany this phenomenon, and the paths it follows in the three main religions. Armstrong considers fundamentalism a cancer eating away at the essence of religions and their divine messages, warns against the use of sacred texts as a cultural and political agenda according to religious interpretations, as this leads to the destruction of society. Armstrong pored over fundamentalism, noting that the three extremist fundamentalisms share commonalities. Fundamentalists have no patience for democracy, party pluralism, religious tolerance, the preservation of peace, free speech, or the separation of religion and state. Instead, they tend to adhere to a single pattern which is one of conflict with the other and which they consider as a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. They derive their ideas from past theories and establish for themselves a private, closed culture that opposes the one prevailing in society from which they withdraw and feel alienated. To achieve goals to their satisfaction, they resort to violence, blood shedding, demolition and destruction, at which time society becomes in their eyes one of infidels who should be embattled through a declared jihad. Thus, all forms of fundamentalism fight and kill in the name of religion.

Armstrong is of the view that fundamentalism is not limited to the three major monotheist religions. "*There are Buddhist, Hindu and even Confucian fundamentalisms, which also cast aside many of the painfully acquired insights of liberal culture, which fight and kill in the name of religion and strive to bring the sacred into the realm of politics and national struggle.*"⁽⁴⁰⁾

As she monitors the rise of fundamentalism in the 20th century, Armstrong refers to the resistance that has for a long time been put up by Christian fundamentalists to scientific discoveries in biology and physics and their insistence that the Book of Genesis was scientific in all its aspects, and

(39) The book was published by Alfred Knopf in New York in 2000. It was translated into Arabic by Dr Fatima Nassr and Dr Mohamed 'Anani and published as part of the series 'Kitab Sotour' in its first edition in Cairo, 2000.

(40) Ibid. , page 4.

that while most of mankind were shedding the shackles of the past, Jewish fundamentalists were pulling out their bag of religious tricks, religious principles, myths and legends that enabled them to restore the reign of religion and reclaim their rights which had been undermined by the Christian West. They considered that their sacred law, which they applied with great vigor and radicalism, was the only international law that was applicable, and saw that Muslim fundamentalists followed on the same path by transforming the Arab-Israeli problem from a worldly issue to a purely religious one.⁽⁴¹⁾

Karen shocks her reader when she proves that fundamentalism only came into existence to defend the holiest values in which it believes, and which were victims of onslaughts from the proponents of modernity. She concedes that the intellectuals who enjoyed the fruits of modernity –her included- and are unable to understand the amount of grief and anguish inflicted by modernity on the hearts of fundamentalists because modernization did not always mean liberation from backwardness, ignorance and the power of the past, but was also achieved through an aggressive attack on religious sanctities. She attributes the outbreak of the battle for God to attempts to fill the void in the heart of a society founded on scientific rationality, and that instead of directing insults to fundamentalists, secular institutions could have turned a probing eye to their own culture which resists understanding them. Because the campaign to restore sanctity to society was often combative, it became belligerent and lost sight of the mutual compassion that all faiths insisted on as the essence of religious life. She pointed out that anger was not felt by the fundamentalists only, as secularists and fundamentalists have often fallen into the trap of mounting antagonisms. Fundamentalists should develop a more compassionate assessment of their enemies in application of their teachings and legacies. On the other hand, secularists should have more faith in Man's propensity for goodness, tolerance and respect for humanity. They should direct more attention to allaying fears and to the needs motivating their fundamentalist neighbors and that no society should ignore.⁽⁴²⁾

(41) For more see the previous reference, chapters 3 and 4, pages 108 and 217.

(42)- Hiba Abdelsattar: '*Indama tandali'u al-Ma'arik fi Sabil Allah*: Karen Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. «Al-Ahram, Cairo, issue 46100, 23 February 2013.

A moderate view of Islam

There is no doubt that the growing global interest in the debate on Islam's impact has made Armstrong a popular and impactful speaker as she helped build a fairly moderate view of Islam by a broad audience in Europe and America. However, this did not satisfy the Jews who acted against her through persistent lobbying campaigns. She was accused by the Jewish orientalist Ephraim Karsh of twisting the truth when she took an objective view of the account on Banu Quraidha.

Armstrong also delivered a lecture at Oxford University on «**Understanding Islam**» in a context of Western fears and theories as well as the extensive Islamophobia that prevailed in the West since 9/11. She said: “*Muslims did not ask us to give up our ideals and values. On the contrary, it is the West which does not honor these very ideals when dealing with Muslims and Islam.*” And many of the questions posed to Armstrong during her lecture tour reflected not only a sense of wanting to know more about Islam, but also how deeply rooted were media representations of Islam in the American psyche.

Armstrong “*The events of 11 September divided US academics into two camps. The first camp, led by Martin Kramer, head of the Near and Middle East Studies Institute in Washington DC, accused Armstrong, together with academics such as John Esposito, head of Islamic-Christian Dialogue at Georgetown University, of ‘duping’ people into believing that Islam was not a threat, an argument Kramer claimed had been proved wrong by the attacks. Only a few weeks after 11 September, Kramer wrote an article, Ivory Towers Built on Sand, in which he put the blame squarely on academics for failing to predict the atrocities.*”

Armstrong explains how the media in the US attempted to silence opposing voices after September 11th. For example, she had been commissioned by the New Yorker magazine to write an article on Islam, but the article was killed and the magazine published instead one by the academic Bernard Lewis.

She says in this regard: “*They thought I am an apologist for Muslims, because my article was about the prophet as a peacemaker, and this did not suit their agenda as much as Lewis's did. Both Lewis and Kramer are staunch Zionists*

who write from a position of extreme bias. But people need to know that Islam is a universal religion, and that there is nothing aggressively oriental or anti-Western about it. Lewis's line, on the other hand, is that Islam is an inherently violent religion." She went to Israel in the mid-1980s and saw the kind of racism against Arabs that dominated Israeli society.⁽⁴³⁾

There is no doubt that orientalist studies are often geared at the pursuit of specific targets and that millions of dollars are allocated to achieving these studies, meaning that they are not innocent of design. One such example is Robert Spencer who works as a special advisor on Islam to some people and groups and who was commissioned to write his first book *Islam Unveiled* to rectify certain misunderstandings about Islam widespread at that time. 'Rectifying' in this specific case was intended as 'distorting the understanding of Islam'. Spencer served as an advisor to the US Central Command (USCC), the US State Department, and the German Foreign Ministry. In 2002, he was appointed by Paul Weyrich at the Free Congress Foundation and asked to write about Islam. He wrote a series of monographs about Islam, but the case of Armstrong is unique, and may be regarded as the closest to moderation.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Karen and the Charter for Compassion

In February 2008, Armstrong presented the TED organization with a draft Charter for Compassion on behalf of the World Council of Religious Leaders, in a bid to draw up a constitution for mercy. Armstrong was awarded a grant of \$100,000 from the TED foundation, a charitable organization offering grants to thinkers who wish to change the world for the better – to create a charter for compassion. These are a set of moral priorities shared by all divine religions and which reduce conflict, advocate love and peace, and embrace a global understanding of the spirit of this golden rule.

In May 2008, Armstrong was awarded the Freedom of Worship Award by the Roosevelt Institute. The Institute stated that she had become an important voice clamoring for mutual understanding at times that are rife with chaos,

(43) Abdurrahman Abu al-Majd: Karen Armstrong: *Hal Heya al-Aqrab ila al-I'tidal?* Op.cit.

(44) Ibid.

confrontation, and violence among religious groups. The institute said that her exemplary personal focus on peace may be rooted in her understanding of religion.

In November 2009, she unveiled the Charter of Compassion in Washington. Its signatories included Prince al-Hassan Ibn Talal, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sir Richard Branson and other religious personalities from non-divine religions.

As expected, a fierce campaign was launched against Armstrong and the Charter for Compassion, including from Sheik Yer Mami who wrote a fiery article titled Karen Armstrong the mother of 'compassionate crackpots', accusing her of insanity and criticizing the Qur'an in the process, claiming that the Qur'an is foreign to this golden rule, and there is no verse speaking of compassion, mercy and mutual compassion. He quoted the divine verse: **[The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,- flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment,]**⁽⁴⁵⁾ omitting to mention the many verses that urge compassion and mercy. Allah (SWT) said: **[Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just].**⁽⁴⁶⁾

Armstrong announced that the project would be applied at al-Qadisiyah girls' school catering for the Muslim community in Amsterdam, at which time the Arabisit Simon Admiral said: **[It is true that al-Qadisiyah was not just any battle, it was the decisive battle over the Persians, and the school in Amsterdam is named after this battle. The language of non-compassion is the language of Islam, and no one until today has been bothered by the claim of great compassion.]**⁽⁴⁷⁾

(45) *An-Nur*, verse 2.

(46) *Al-Mumtahana*, verse 8.

(47) Abdurrahman Abu al-Majd: *Karen Armstrong: Hal Heya al-Aqrab ila al-I'3tidal?*

Positions and views

After years of research, study and writing about Islam and its civilization and prophet, she came to a clear set of positions and views. When asked how she found Islam after studying all divine religions and whether it deserved the Western onslaughts on it, she said that she found Islam radically different from the one portrayed by Western media and many conservative right-wing currents in the West. Islam, she said, did not call for treating with hostility with any of the divine religions that preceded it and did not call for their rejection. Islam did not at all ask Muslims to hate Judaism or Jews. On the contrary, the Qur'an urges Muslims to believe in all the divine religions that preceded it and to have good dealings with the people of the book, totally in contrast with the Western perception of it as a violent religion that does not accept non-Muslims. She also said that she found that Prophet Muhammad was an exemplary personality, with important lessons not only for Muslims, but for the West as well.

She says: "Anti-Islamic doctrine is in-built in the Western ethos that was formulated during the Crusades," she says. «This was the period when the Western world was re-defining itself. The 11th century marked the end of the Dark Ages in Europe and the beginnings of the new Europe. The Crusades were the first co-operative act on the part of the whole new Europe, and the whole crusading ethos shaped the psyche of the key actors performing at this crucial time Islam was the quintessential foreigner, and people resented Islam in Europe much as people in the Third World resent the US today.]

On the successive onslaughts against Islam in the West, she concurred that that unfortunately these severe abuses are recurrent, but Muslims should be aware that those who denigrate Islam are a minority. She explained and the problem lies in the fact that the majority in European and American societies do not understand the principles of Islam and are unaware of its tolerance and that it is a religion of mercy and peace. She argued that this allowed fanatics in the west to spread their thoughts and plants the seeds of hatred for Islam among the masses there. She added that so far Muslims have not yet figured how to face European society through dialogue to familiarize it with the true nature of this religion, its noble principles and lofty values, especially

since most of these societies do not consider religions above criticism in view of the high esteem in which they hold freedom of expression. Suffice it to mention that a large proportion of young people in Britain, the Netherlands and other European countries have no idea about their religion, and most of whom do not even believe in God. This, she said, explains their surprise at seeing the Muslims' outrage at the comments and sarcastic drawings made of their Messenger and their religion. She explained that many of these young people do not even know who the Virgin Mary is. Some cast doubts about her virginity, she who is the most virtuous woman on earth, and others claimed that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. It is therefore no surprise that some of these people would level accusations at the Messenger of Islam, asserting that the moments of revelation were nothing but bouts of epilepsy to which he was victim.

She spoke of the fact that Muslims have been remiss in presenting the tolerant image of Islam saying that it is important to acknowledge all the evidence pointing to the Muslims' long standing failure to acquaint the world with the message of Muhammad (PBUH), a prophet sent by Allah to bring glad tidings and mercy to the worlds. They retreated within their borders, limited themselves to their rites of worship, and then went about lamenting the West's ignorance and errors against their religion. They decried this loudly, wailing at and insulting those who made a mockery of their book and their Messenger, and did not seek out the fair Western authors who speak well of this religion and its noble prophet. Today's Muslims have forgotten that their ancestors built a great civilization because they were keen to learn and made sure to put what they had learnt to good use. In contrast, today's Muslims are happy to import all their knowledge from the West and that is why the West has come to believe that they are helplessly dependent on humanity. Therefore, if the Muslim world really wished to defend its belief, Muslims must hasten to contribute to the civilizational march, and refrain from being mere spectators, especially since we live in times where only the language of interests is recognized. If the Muslims rise up and gain a scientific edge, there can be doubt that the West will see them as equals and will not risk offending a single Muslim.

The rapprochement of Islam and the West

Karen Armstrong affirms that the West must play a pivotal role in the process of convergence with the Islamic world and must remove from its curricula anything that is offensive to Islam. For example, the West must understand that the Holy Qur'an entrusted Muslims with a historic mission which is the creation of a just society of where all the members enjoy the same esteem and respect. The experience born out of establishing and living in such a society has granted on Muslims the essence of religious life which means that the affairs of the State are inseparable from the spiritual affairs of Muslims. The Qur'an prohibits hegemony and fighting is only permitted in self-defense. Islam affirms that the true Islamic values are peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. The word (jihad) does not mean holy war, as some believe in the West, but struggling and endeavoring. Also, Muslims are instructed to spare no effort at the economic, social, intellectual and ethnic, and spiritual fronts to fulfill God's will. Jihad is a spiritual value for most Muslims and is not associated with violence. Islam is not a religion of the sword as we have been told when we were small, so we also need, and not just Muslims, to reform our curricula.

Islam and women's rights

We find her defending the condition of women in Islam and tackling the misconceptions held in the West about Islam's intransigent position towards women. She says that Islam gave women rights they never enjoyed before, even under two former monotheistic religions. She limited herself to a story that happened during the Hudaibiya peace negotiations when Muslims were incensed by the way the negotiations were conducted by Suhail Ibn 'Amr with the Messenger (PBUH). He started by refusing the use of the Basmallah as per the Islamic way. Then he refused to write down Muhammad's status as a prophet, but wrote the name of Muhammad only. After that he refused that Muslims enter the Kaaba in that year and asked for postponement to the following year. He further compounded the situation with the very unfair condition that reflected an inequality of obligations, requesting that Muhammad (PBUH) send away any person who came to him without his or her master's permission, but without committing Quraish to the same condition.

The nerves of the Muslims could not bear all of that, except for the Prophet (PBUH) who ordered them to undo their ihram and slaughter the sacrifice indicating their return home without performing the 'umra. Sad, the Messenger (PBUH) went to his wife Um Salama in her tent and said: "*The people have perished.. The people have perished as they disobeyed the order of their prophet*". Um Salama urged him to undo his ihram and present his sacrifice without arguing with anyone or paying attention to their words. The Messenger (PBUH) did so, after which the remaining Muslims followed suit. Thus he saved the ummah from certain and severe strife by heeding the advice of Um al Mumineen Um Salama...Women played a prominent political role in the lives of Muslims and were never as neglected as is usually claimed. They were involved in politics, in trade, even in war and in all affairs of life, although precedence was given to the home and to the upbringing of children -a very important task-, to preparing food, mending clothes, and sourcing water from outside. Many were the affairs entrusted to women and to which they paid more attention than trading money through speculation and Murabaha as did Khadija, Um al-Mumineen with her money before and after Islam. Many are also the aspects dictated by circumstances and that make women decide at one time or the other to execute some task or leave it to the Man. What imports is that responsibilities are distributed fairly and equitably, without undermining the rights of women.

The Arab-Israeli conflict

On her position about the Arab-Israeli conflict, she says with brutal frankness that the Israeli occupation is engaged in immoral practices, helped along by the fact that we live in a world marked by imbalance and double standards. What is strange is that the West which believes that one day it did a great injustice to the Jews is redressing this injustice by helping the Jews oppress other people, the Palestinians in particular, and Muslims in general. From a moral and human point of view, she sees that the West must exercise some pressure on the Israelis to put an end to the humiliation of the Palestinians, and that in all honesty, the West needs to raise the voice of compassion that had gone totally silent before the Zionist media machine which never stopped badmouthing the Palestinian cause even though it stands behind the continuing religious and political conflict opposing the East and the West.

Armstrong believes that the Israeli occupation is responsible for the kind of violent resistance it meets from the Palestinians saying that the resistance will be as ruthless and violent as the occupation and that every occupation breeds its own kind of resistance. She says that in all honesty, the West has to share a responsibility for the Arab-Israeli situation. Britain decided in 1917 through the Balfour Promise to give the Jews land they did not own in Palestine and ignored the aspirations and plight of the original Palestinian population. The United States is now supporting Israel economically and politically and also ignores the plight of the Palestinians. This is extremely dangerous, because the Palestinians will not go away, and if no solution is reached to ensure security for the Israelis, political independence and security for the Palestinians, there will be no hope for peace in the world. She explained that that whenever she remembered the extent to the Palestinians' suffering as result of the policy of double standards, she feels ashamed of belonging to a region area that practices that despicable policy.", she adds.

Karen was harassed by the American Jewish lobby, especially radical Jewish organizations in reaction to her multiple criticisms of Israel. But she always responded by drawing attention to the difference between talking about Judaism, the religion that Moses (peace be upon him) preached and addressing the occupied Israeli entity that has usurped the land and holy sites of others, adding that she has always endeavored to present this vision at all the conferences and forums she participates in, so that the world understand that the Palestinian resistance is justified".⁽⁴⁸⁾

In a lecture given by Armstrong at the Cairo American University on December 12, 2005 on *The Future of Islam in the West*, she stressed that the solution to the clash of civilizations we are witnessing today is dialogue and cooperation, changing the way we evaluate ourselves, in knowing the other in order to protect the world from terrorism. She pointed out that the media project the wrong images of Islam and the West.

(48) Iyad Abdallah: British thinker and nun Karen Armstrong to *Al-Madina Newspaper*: The majority of Europeans do not understand the nature of Islam.

She added that Islam was a religion of peace and tolerance, and not one of violence, praising the sermon of the Prophet (PBUH) when he entered Mecca, and the verse saying [***We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another,***] calling on everyone to appreciate that we are all from Adam and that Adam was made from clay.

She said that the September 11th events exacerbated the clash of civilizations, especially in America which was shocked by these attacks. People began to say terrible things about the prophet, describing him as a terrorist, with growing numbers of people speaking ill of Islam. But in return, others have begun to search for anything related to Islam.

She explained that during her visit to America after these attacks, she was surprised by the large number of Americans coming to talk about Islam. She shared with them many difficult truths about the policies of Britain and America, in an attempt to erase the negative view they had of Islam.

Armstrong said that a great divide exists between Europe and America. The United States is the second largest religious country after India, while Europe is considered secular, Britain being the most secular of all with a religious ratio of 6% of the population, leading to a different view of Islam.

She confirmed that while in America she met with Muslims trying to be good Muslims and good Americans at the same time, in the hope of building a bridge to help the Western world see the true face of Islam, whereas in Britain (very secular), she did not perceive any desire among British Muslims to fill the office of imam, and thus imams have to come from some village in Bangladesh and generally have no idea what to tell the congregation.

Armstrong believes that Muslims are labeled as terrorists because the media which circulates misconceptions about this religion. There are deeply seated stereotypes about Muslims in the West although Westerners know little about Islam. She pointed out that in the past the West showed little interest in Islam and in the 16th century, Europe was just like today's third world while the Islamic world was like America, more powerful and more civilized. The West began to form an idea about Islam from the writings of European travellers.