



**ISLAM BETWEEN
TRUTH AND FALSE ALLEGATIONS
A RESPONSE TO THE FALSE ALLEGATIONS
AGAINST ISLAM**

By

**Dr. Ahmad Shalabi
Dr. Ahmad Omar Hashem
Dr. Ahmed Kamal Abu Al Majd
Dr. Abdel Sabour Shahin
Dr. Abdel Sabour Marzuq
Dr. Mahmud Hamdi Zaqzuq**

Prepared by

Dr. Hamed Taher

Translated by

Dr. Lahcen Haddad

Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
-ISESCO- 1420H/1999

**Photocomposition and Typesetting :
ISESCO**

Legal number : 1254/99
ISBN : 9981-26-191-2

Printing :Imprimerie Al Maarif Al
Jadida - Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco



Dedications

We dedicate this Book

To all Muslims

To all people of the Divine Religions

To Anyone with a Mind, a Heart and a Reason

To all Human Beings Everywhere

Table of Contents

	Page
Preface	11
Introduction	13
The Complete Meaning of Islam	15
Allegations and Responses	31
The Allegation that the Origin of the Qur'an is Human, not Divine ...	31
The Allegation that the Qur'an was not Collected during the Prophet's Lifetime, that it was the Companions who Wrote it down and Classified it, and that Uthman Ben Affan Burnt all the Copies that were Different from his Own	35
The Allegation that the Prophet (MAPBUH) Used to Change his Tactics in Accordance with the Conditions; hence he Presented Islam in Mecca as an Arabic Religion, then when he Won in El Medina, he Turned it into a Universal Religion	37
The Allegation that Muhammad (MAPBUH) was a Lascivious Man, as can be Made Clear from his Marrying so Many Wives	38
The Allegation that the Second Source of Islam (the Prophetic Tradition) is Doubtful because it Contains Apocryphal Sayings	40
The Allegation that there is no Need to Follow Prophetic Sayings because they are Full of Contradictions	42
The Allegation that Islam Got Spread out with the Sword, always Preceded by Victorious Armies	43
The Allegation that Islamic Conquests are in fact no more than Colonial Expansions Motivated by Economic Interests (to get booty and levy taxes)	45

The Allegation that Muslims were Peoples who did not Respect Old Civilizations, an Example of which was the Burning of the Alexandria Library	47
The Allegation that Islam is a Religion that does not only Allow the Use of Reason but Makes it Subject to Religious Texts	49
The Allegation that Islam Calls for its Followers to be Lazy and not to Look for Reasons	51
The Allegation that the Position of Women is Low and that their Rights are not Ensured	53
The Allegation that Women in Islam are Dependent on Men	55
The Allegation that Islam is Unfair to Women by Giving them half the Share of a Man in Inheritance	57
Why does Islam Make the Testimony of Two Women Equal to that of One Man ?	58
The Allegation that Islam does not Allow Women to Hold High State Positions	59
The Allegation that Islam Forces a Woman to Wear the Veil, a Fact which Prevents Her From Education and Employment	60
The Allegation that the Veil Jeopardizes a Muslim Woman's Efficiency in Today's Modern World	61
The Allegation that Islam Calls upon Men to Marry more than One Woman, and even Four	62
The Allegation that Islam Allows the Muslim Man to Marry a Non-Muslim Woman while it Prohibits the Marriage of a Muslim Woman to a non-Muslim Man	64
The Allegation that the Islamic Alms Create Unequal Opportunities between the Rich and the Poor Muslims before Allah, since the Rich Have their Money to Help them Aspire to a Better Reward ...	65

The Allegation that Islam's Prohibition of Pork is not Justified since Pork is like any Other Animal	66
Why does Islam Prohibit Men from Wearing Gold and Silk ?	67
On the Claim that Islam is against the Freedom of Belief because it Permits the Killing of the Apostate	68
The Allegation that the Stand Taken by Contemporary Muslims towards Salman Rushdi is Contrary to the Principles of the Freedom of Expression	70
The Allegation that the Punishment Set by the Islamic Law (such as the Severing of the Thief's Hand and the Stoning of the Adulterer) is Extremely Violent and Barbarous	71
The Allegation that Islamic Fasting Jeopardizes the Efficiency of both Individual and Society	72
The Allegation that Islam is not Compatible with Modern Civilization, a Fact which Explains the Muslims' Backwardness	74
On the Question of why Muslims Are Victims of Dispute and Dissension whereas Islam Calls for Unity	75
The Allegation that the Islamic Jihad (Holy War) Incites Muslims to Inflict Harm upon Others	76
The Allegation that Islam Is Incompatible with Democracy and Human Rights and that the Ruler Is under no Obligation to Seek Counsel from Other Muslims -along with the Unsustained Accusation of the Muslims' Stand vis-à-vis the Other Opinion	78
The Allegation that Islam Is Hostile to Art (Music, Song, Dance, Sculpture, Photography and Theater)	82
The Allegation that Islam Calls for Intolerance and Extremism and that the Term "Muslim" Has Become Synonymous with "Terrorist"	83
Epilogue	87

FOREWORD

As part of its endeavour to spread the Islamic culture far and wide, develop the contents of this culture, raise a sound awareness about its purport and objectives, promote the Islamic thought and strengthen its role in the shaping of modern life, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) included in its Three-Year Action Plan for 1998-2000 **a project on fostering awareness about the Islamic heritage and addressing issues of modern times**. Focusing on the Islamic heritage, the project aims to broach this lore from a contemporary perspective so as to shed ample light on its riches and expound issues and concepts not within reach for the present-day researcher and reader. Modern cultural and social issues are thus examined, and their cultural, economic and political implications investigated against the Islamic principles and fundamentals in such a way as to bring answers to the questions and problems raised by these issues.

One of the components of this project consists in the preparation of a series of fifteen studies featuring the Islamic outlook on subjects and problems of interest to the contemporary society. Translated and published in Arabic, English and French booklets, the studies will be subsequently released through ISESCO's Islamic database aimed to publicize the religion, culture and civilization of Islam through Internet.

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is pleased, therefore, to present ***“Islam Between Truth and False Allegations”*** to the reader. Addressing the fallacies harboured by certain non-Muslims about social issues, the book expounds in a crystal-clear manner the Islamic standpoint vis-à-vis those issues, and redresses the misrepresentations circulated about the righteous religion of Islam.

Our thanks are due to the authors, Dr. Ahmed Shalabi, Dr. Ahmed Omar Hashem, Dr. Ahmed Kamal Abu Al Majd, Dr. Abdel Sabour Shahin, Dr. Abdel Sabour Marzuq, Dr. Mahmud Hamdi Zaquq, and Dr. Hamed

Taher who contributed to the elaboration of the book and drafted it in a well-organized manner that facilitates its reading.

Our thanks also go to Dr. Lahcen Haddad, author of the English translation.

It is hoped that this publication will rise to the expectations pinned by readers on their Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

We beseech Almighty Allah to crown our efforts with success, guide us to the right path and enhance the benefits of this book.

Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri
Director General of
the Islamic Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization
-ISESCO-

INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah, the God of all worlds. Prayer and Peace be upon the most honored of all Messengers, our Lord Muhammad, his family and all his Companions.

Islam was and still is target to many types of religious and political animosity. Its enemies have used various material and moral means and did not spare any against it; their goal has been to destroy it completely or to limit its expansion, which is becoming larger and larger.

It was assaulted by polytheists in Mecca, Jews in El Medina, Christian scholars in Damascus and Baghdad, as well as by many orientalist. The most important reason which pushed them to oppose it was the fact that it was attracting so many followers who have found in it peace of the soul, sound logic for the mind, and a morally upright lifestyle.

Islam recommends that its message be spread out in a wise manner, using good counsel, without arguing with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) except in the most appropriate manner. None is forced to convert to Islam, especially that one of its principles is : "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" (Baqara, 256).

Islam is a religion which attacks nobody but is capable of defending itself. Recently, Islam has been the target of ferocious attacks, implying that it is the new enemy to be fought after the fall of communism. These biased allegations rely upon take the abnormal behavior of a small group of Muslims and generalize it on almost a billion Muslims living in various parts of the world.

The truth of Islam is as clear as the sun. But even then, some ignore this truth and try to mislead the others into ignoring it. To these and others, the book, which looks simple, albeit being deep in its meaning, is addressed.

First : It shows the complete meaning of Islam, using its basic sources, namely the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions, and highlighting its basic ideas in the domains of doctrine, worship, ethics and legislation. Only after this, will the true image of Islam appear -an image that will dispel all the wrong stereotypes propagated by some about it.

Second : The main objective behind this book is to respond to the most important allegations against Islam, be they new or old, after putting them together in this form in a scientific style based on argument and evidence. This book will present the contemporary Muslim with an instrument that is useful for defending his religion against slanders and calumnies.

The reader will find every allegation accompanied by a detailed response made up of specific points one can resort to in part or as a whole in any act of calm and objective argumentation.

The book is extremely simple and precise, the aim being to make it easy for its scientific arguments to be translated to all world languages.

We have to note here that this small book was prepared collectively. A selection of well-known scholars and Muslim intellectuals in Egypt, whose names are mentioned on the cover, took part in responding to the allegation. It was also revised in the Celebrated Azhar and in the Egyptian Dar El Ifta'.

May Allah bestow the best of rewards to all the participants for their effort in defending this religion and showing its true meaning.

The Complete Meaning of Islam

Islam is the lastly revealed of the divine religions. It is characterized by its simplicity and is easy to accept by all minds. Its teachings concern human beings in all places and all times.

As soon as any person declares the "Shahada" i.e. that "there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah", he becomes a Muslim with specific rights and duties, all organized in a complete religious, social, and cultural system that takes into consideration the material conditions as well as the spiritual ambitions of groups and individuals.⁽¹⁾

Because of the widespread misunderstanding or lack of understanding for Islam, it becomes incumbent upon us to present its complete meaning in its pristine state as well as in terms of the history of its formation, using as a basis its fundamental sources which refer directly to the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions.

Islam has four basic constituents, without which its system could not have been established : doctrine, rituals, ethics, and legislation.

The place of doctrine is the heart. It involves believing in the oneness of Allah, the Creator of the universe, the Creator of its order, the One Who Knows its secrets, and the Only One to deserve worship and all what goes along with it, including supplication, repentance, and the seeking of help, then the belief in resurrection after death and all what follows this belief, namely judgement, recompense, and retribution.

The Qur'an and the Traditions have limited the elements of doctrine to believing in Allah, his Angels, His scriptures, His Prophets, and in destiny i.e. in the good and the bad, and in the Day of Judgement.

1. Acceptable is the Islam of whoever believes in the oneness of Allah and the fact that Muhammad was his messenger, whose heart is full of faith, but who does not declare his belief, out of consideration for social pressures, on the condition that he does not take part in any action against Muslims.

It is required that the doctrine be indelibly established in the heart of the Muslim and deeply rooted in his mind. In this context, we should note that the Holy Qur'an calls on every human being to make sure for himself that this doctrine is true by looking at the history and the fate of previous nations, and by constantly observing the universe and contemplating its natural phenomena, so as to strengthen the faith in the heart through reasoned acceptance.

Doctrine has a fundamental status in the Qur'an, especially that it is the axis around which a Muslim's life revolves and to which it is related. It is common knowledge that the Prophet (ﷺ : May Allah's Prayer and Peace Be Upon Him) stayed in Mecca for thirteen years, teaching people the doctrine. Almost half of the Qur'an talks about it and tries to stress its importance. Many of the early Muslims, men and women, were martyred defending it, after being tortured by Meccan polytheists who tried by all means to get them change the form of professing the unity of Allah back to idolatry.

The truth is that it is Islamic doctrine which gives meaning and telos to the life of the Muslim. At the time when he shows submission to the Lord of the skies and earth, a Muslim feels that he is under divine providence, and that Allah's mercy protects him from every side. All man's deeds -in the context of a true Islamic doctrine- become oriented toward one goal which is to attain Allah's blessing and avoid His wrath. Gradually, a sort of moral consciousness gets set up in the heart of a Muslim, a consciousness that is hypersensitive to questions of good and bad, depravity and virtue, all of which are referred to in religious terminology as "*taqwa*" (godliness).

Islamic rituals are four : prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage.

Prayer is one of the foundations of religion. "*Salat*" literally means the invocation of Allah. It is in fact a set of invocations and Qur'anic verses which are recited in parallel to specific acts and movements (upright position, bowing, and prostration). "*Salat*" is performed either individually or in a group made up of well-organized rows led by an "*Imam*". Group prayer is better and more rewarding. Muslims are required to pray five times a day: at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at dinner time.

On Friday, a special group prayer is held, attended by a large number of people from the neighborhood. It is preceded by a "sermon" in which the Imam discusses one of the issues that are of concern to Muslims and calls upon them to stick to religion and to ask Allah's forgiveness.⁽²⁾

But is prayer merely a set of invocations and acts which are devoid of spiritual content? On the contrary, in Islam, it is a form of direct meeting between the Muslim and his God. The Holy Qur'an states that whenever the Muslim prostrates, he is closer to his God: "*But bow down in adoration, and bring thyself closer (to God)!*" ('Alaq, 19). The Holy Qur'an describes prayer as something that "*restrains from shameful and unjust deeds*" (Ankabut, 45). This means that the true prayer undertaken by a Muslim in complete consciousness and submissiveness will naturally prevent him from committing big crimes as well as small sins. It is difficult to imagine a man who will finish his meeting with Allah and get ready for another meeting wherein he commits whatever Allah does not like.

In the description of "*Salat*" in the Qur'an, it is stated that it is, along with endurance, an important means that helps the Muslim face the daily problems he is exposed to: "*O ye who believe! seek help with patient perseverance and prayer*" (Baqara, 153). This means that prayer plays a positive role in the life of the Muslim: while it certainly prepares him for the problems of daily life, it gives him also the opportunity to achieve psychological contentment. That's why the Prophet (MAPBUH) used to say to Bilal, the muezzin, "*Relieve us with it, O Bilal*" (reported by Abu Dawud and Darqatani).

The basic condition for prayer is the purity of the body attained through worship or ablutions. It is clear that it comes after bodily cleanliness in order to purify the psyche and the soul.

In this way, the meaning intended by the Prophet (MAPBUH) in a beautiful saying comparing the prayer undertaken by a Muslim five times a day to a man's washing five times a day in a river running in front of his house. Like this last person who has got his body clean from any dirt, the praying person has got his soul purified and cleansed (reported by Al Bukhari and Muslim).

2. Friday Prayer is mandatory for men but not for women.

Finally, because it involves invocations, the seeking of Allah's help, and the orientation of one's heart, mind and body towards Allah, prayer plays an important role in enhancing the doctrine in the psyche of the Muslim, and supplying it with a daily renewable energy.

Fasting consists in refraining from food and drinking (as well as matrimonial sexual intercourse) from dawn to sunset, during the month of Ramadan.⁽³⁾

Some went as far as saying that the goal behind fasting is to make the rich feel the pain of hunger endured by the poor. But fasting is required of all Muslims, be they rich or poor. The interpretation that is closest to the nature of this ritual is the one that holds that fasting plays an important role in changing the habits of a Muslim that may have formed all throughout the year. It is noticed that during the month of Ramadan the lives of all Muslims become organized in a unitary manner, which is different from what happens during the other months.

Therefore, the opportunity is ripe for whoever has got used to bad habits (like coffee drinking, smoking, etc.) to give them up after the month of Ramadan, which requires refraining from necessary activities like eating and drinking.

There are two sorts of wisdom clearly related to fasting : First, it strengthens the Muslim's human will; will here means the ability to take the decision of refraining from all desirable things. A human being's food could be available, but he refrains from taking it in respect for the teachings of religion and in execution of Allah's orders. Therefore, if he succeeds in refraining from doing what is *halal* (permitted), he will be able to refrain from committing forbidden (*haram*) acts, such as swindling people's money in an illegal manner and the nurturing of forbidden desires and all that leads to disorder and anarchy.

3. The fasting person does not reach the highest degrees of penitence except if he controls himself and opts for forgiveness, sympathy and altruism, refraining from hurting others or insulting them, forgiving them as much as possible.

The second wisdom of fasting consists in reviving religious ethical standards (human conscience). It is clear that fasting, unlike other rites, has a negative character; when a Muslim performs it, it does not manifest itself on his body like prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage. Who can tell the difference between a person who has had his breakfast in the morning and another who has not had ? It is clear, therefore, that fasting is "a very special form of worship" taking place between the Muslim and his God, of which no one knows anything except Allah. In fasting, there is no room for showing off, that is to do something in order to show off and earn the others' esteem. Allah said in a revealed Prophetic Saying : "*Anything that a human being does is his, except fasting, which is for me, and I am the one to reward it*" (reported by Muslim).

This religious standard (or conscience) that fasting sows in the heart of the Muslim is what we referred to as "*Taqwa*" (godliness). It is a kind of constant and watchful feeling that Allah knows all of what goes on inside us and not only what we do and say out of people's sight.

After prayer and fasting, come the two other rites, namely almsgiving and pilgrimage. The first is required of wealthy people only and the second concerns whoever can afford it.

Almsgiving (*Zakat*) in Arabic means well-being and purity. According to jurisprudence, it consists of giving a very small percentage of what one has earned in one year, and which one does not need for daily expenses. It is doubtless that divine justice is very clear in this context. The person who earns his living on a daily basis should not give alms and the person who has got a lot of wealth but keeps spending from it all throughout the year to a point that nothing is left from it after a year has elapsed should not give alms. He should give only a determined part and on the condition that that wealth remains unchanged for a whole year in the possession of the person concerned. Small percentages of the yearly crops are due on the part of farmers.

Because the objective behind levying *Zakat* is to deal with the problem of poverty and because people cannot individually supervise the impact of almsgiving on improving poor people's conditions, it is required

that an institution specialized in gathering alms from Muslims and distributing them be set up so as to ensure that Zakat carries out its function in improving the conditions of society. Allah specified in the Holy Qur'an the various aspects of how the money should be spent. All of them revolve around helping the needy and alleviating the misery of the poor. "*Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer (the funds); for those hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of god and for the wayfarer*" (Thawba, 60). Through this ritual, a sort of social welfare, necessary for the balance of the mobility of Islamic society and its stability is ensured.

But the wealthy Muslim knows well that the alms he is required to give represents only a small percentage of his general income, his savings, his trade and his harvest. Therefore, he is constantly urged to "give" for the sake of charity and social reform. We see many Muslims who use their own money to build mosques, free schools and hospitals for the needy. After their death, they bequeath "charitable donations", the regular profit of which is used to help the poor and the needy.

If almsgiving is required of every Muslim who can financially afford it, pilgrimage, which is the fourth and last form of worship, is required of those Muslims who can afford it financially and physically, once in a lifetime.

Pilgrimage is a trip to Mecca where Al Ka'bah, Allah's Holy Shrine, which was built by Ibrahim (PBUH), is located. It is the point of direction toward which Muslims turn in their daily prayers. It comprises a set of rituals, the most important of which being to go around Al Ka'bah, to stand on the Mount of Arafat, and to declare the unicity of Allah, and submission to him, as well as to thank Him for His blessings and gifts.

At the time of pilgrimage, Muslims from all over the world, from different nations and languages, gather together to serve one goal and carry out unified rituals. They may carry out exchanges among themselves and emphasize their brotherly relationship and renew the basis of cooperation among themselves. It is clear that as part of this big gathering, the Muslim feels proud of the Islam he believes in and which has pushed

all of these people around him to respond to the same call and strive for the same goal. Hence, the circle which starts with the individual and ends with full humanity. Allah's sayings in the Qur'an come true : "*We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger)*" (Saba', 28), and "*Say : 'O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Apostle of God'*" (A'raf, 158).

Those are Islamic rituals : simple, gradual and interconnected. It is remarked that it emphasizes in the soul of the Muslim his submission to Allah, his constant fear of Him, as well as His unrelenting attempt to secure His blessing. At the same time it binds the Muslim to his God, it establishes the best relationship between him and the people around him. Prayer is most often performed in the company of people from the neighbourhood; fasting prevents a Muslim from hurting other Muslims with his hands or tongue; almsgiving makes him give and softens his heart vis-a-vis the needy and the poor. Lastly, pilgrimage is a big conference where a Muslim meets his brothers and sisters from different nations; it is a meeting with human dimensions that transcend differences in race or language.

We see, therefore, that with his strong sense of dogma and his sincere performance of rituals, a Muslim becomes ready to become a useful citizen in a morally upright society. The useful member of society is the one who, urged by his conscience, avoids all forms of malediction and sticks to all forms of benediction, without needing the control of a human boss or a supervisor. We get here to the third basic element in Islam, namely ethics.

Ethics (*Akhlaq*) in Arabic is the plural of "*Khuluq*". "*Khuluq*" means simply a motivation and a behavior. Motivation concerns intention, will and determination. Behavior concerns, however, a man's external acts. It is clear that motivation is the basis of behavior. That is why Islam has always been concerned with promoting the development of this motivation. Development will start with relating it to doctrines and constantly renewing it through rituals. The goal is to make the Muslim whose intention is always to gain Allah's blessing, whose objective is to obey His commands, and who is always feeling that Allah controls his movements aware of the smallest of his thoughts.

But ethics does not appear in behavior only. It cannot *be* without the existence of other persons with whom one could carry out mutual transactions. We can say generally that the transactions that constitute the context of a man's behavior are of three main types: the circle of family and neighbours, the circle of friends and colleagues, and the circle of Muslims and others.

In dealing with relatives, the famous Islamic expression, "uterine bonds," (*Silat arrahim*) which means the perennial character of love, mercy, help and care for all relatives.

First and foremost, care for parents has a special status in Islam. The Prophet (MAPBUH) said to a Muslim who asked him about taking care of his father : "*You and what you own belong to your father*" (reported by Ibn Majah and Tabarani). The mother deserves all kinds of love and care : "*Paradise is at the heels of mothers*" (reported by Qada'i in *Musnad Ashshihab* and Khatib Baghdadi in *Al Jaami*). Obeying parents in Islam is absolute. There is only one exception : when parents urge their children to renege or to become polytheists.

Maybe, we have not begun to appreciate the value of Islamic teachings on mercy and compassion to parents till modern times when "houses for the elderly" appeared. To these houses old parents are brought by their sons and daughters for health and cultural care; but these places are devoid of the warm relationship denoted by the Islamic expression, "uterine bonds."

Islam also produces all the conditions propitiate for treating one's wife correctly. Treating her well ranges from satisfying her material needs to honoring her and ensuring respect for her at home by addressing her with love and care. The value of the mode of address differs according to customs and cultures; an example of the good customs in some societies calling the wife with her last name as "the mother of so and so" rather than with her first name.

Islam does not recognize forced marriages. A couple is free to start a marriage and preserve it honoring each other. If living together becomes impossible between them for any kind of reason, divorce becomes a

solution. And even then, the husband should be very generous. Allah said : "*The parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness*" (Baqara, 229). It means that marriage should continue with honor or be discontinued in a respectful and generous manner.

What we sometimes hear about forcing girls against their will to marry men they don't like, mistreating wives, or using the right to divorce in a harmful manner -all of these spring from uncivilized natures and irresponsible forms of behavior which are at odds with Islam and Islamic teachings.

Honoring one's neighbour occupies an important place in Islamic ethics as well. It implies a great wisdom not unheeded by human sociologists. The Prophet (MAPBUH) said, "*Jibril kept advising me to take care of one's neighbour to such a point that I thought he would give him the right to inherit* [from his neighbour]" (reported by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tarmidhi, and Ibn Hanbal). This means that neighbours are an extension of the family. A Muslim is required to visit his sick neighbour and console him when a tragedy befalls him, as well as take part in his celebrations and show his care for him through gifts and invitations. It is certain that respecting this kind of relationship is what has made of the "neighbourhood" in Islamic society an organic and interconnected unit. Foreign tourists always notice this phenomenon when they visit Islamic countries with strong cultural traditions.

If it is true that the city, with its life which is marked by individualism and egocentrism, has broken Islamic relations between neighbours, it is also true that popular quarters and the wide rural areas still preserve many of these links.

Also, in treating his friends and colleagues well, the Muslim is a good model for cooperation : "*The believer is to another believer like a strong building, each part supporting the other*" (reported by Bukhari, Muslim, Tarmidhi and Nisa'i).

The same thing goes for all Muslims being brothers in believing in Allah. The Prophetic Saying has it that "*A man should desire for his brother [Muslim] what he likes for himself*". The Prophet [MAPBUH] also said :

"None of you is a true believer until he desires for his brother what he likes for himself" (reported by Bukhari, Muslim, Tarmidhi, Nisa'i, Ibn Majah and Ibn Hanbal). The same is true of sincerity, trustworthiness, keeping promises, giving good counsel, and constantly seeking to help friends.

In the context of dealing with Muslims in general, we find the Prophetic Saying which defines the Muslim as the one from whose tongue and actions people are safe. The Prophet says : "*The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands Muslims are safe*" (reported by Bukhari, Muslim, Tarmidhi, Nisa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Hanbal). This means that the good Muslim does not harm others with his words and deeds. That is why it is advisable to clear the road from trash and rocks which may cause harm to the people using it.

If abstaining from hurting is a negative act which consists of not doing something, there are other acts which are positive : greeting people who are seated or passing, responding to the greetings of others with something equal or better, getting permission before entering other people's homes, avoiding looking at unfamiliar women, debating in respectful manner, advising in a wise manner. This in addition to being generous to guests, feeding the hungry, and housing strangers who are homeless, and similar acts of social solidarity.

Non-Muslims who live among Muslims and who are generally either Jews or Christians, have the same rights and duties as Muslims. They get from true Muslims all forms of respect for their rituals. Muslims are permitted to eat their food and marry their women. If one debates them one should do so in a respectful manner. Economic exchange with them is also permitted. When the Prophet (MAPBUH) died, his shield was still held under mortgage in the possession of a Jew. Among the Prophet's wives, we find Maria the Coptic, the mother of his son Ibrahim.

'Umar Ibn El Khattab (MABH), the second Caliph gave the poor from among the People of the Book, money from the Islamic Treasury House. He also gave tax breaks to priests and rabbis. Throughout Islamic history, Caliphs' and rulers' physicians came mostly from among the Jews

and Christians. Islamic civilization was for them a land of opportunity where they achieved prosperity and well-being. Persecution happened only at the times of fanaticism and backwardness, at the hands of people who did not understand the spirit of Islam and who acted out of purely rotten individual interests.

Islamic ethics are not limited to how to deal with people; they extend to animals and nature, including inanimate things and flora.

According to the Qur'an, earth is a place for sowing grains not for wreaking havoc. Seas are at the service of man, used for transporting people and food, for extracting healthy food and not for nuclear experiments as is the case today. The Prophet (MAPBUH) forbids Muslims, at the time of war, to cut trees except for food. Islam is also very merciful to animals. People should not make them fight (as in cockfights) or use them for things they were not created for (as in bullfights). When the Prophet (MAPBUH) saw a bird fluttering her wings close to the earth, he told his companions : "*Who afflicted this bird by taking her son away from her ? Give back her son*" (Abu Dawud's *Sanan*).

It is reported that the Prophet (MAPBUH) said : a woman went to hell because she tied a cat, did not feed her and did not let her eat from the grass on earth till she died (reported by Bukhari and Muslim).

It was also reported that the Prophet (MAPBUH) said that a man felt extremely thirsty; so he went down a well to drink; when he got out, he found a dog lolling its tongue and licking the ground from thirst. He said : "*This dog is suffering from the same thirst I was suffering from.*" He went down, filled his shoe and gave the dog to drink. God then forgave him.

This is only a brief sketch of some aspects of Islamic ethics, which are numerous and varied. It is possible to say that Islam is wholly ethical. The Prophet (MAPBUH) used to stress that he was sent only to complete the noble traits of character (Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad* and Malik's *Muwatta'*). He said about himself : "*My God is my educator; He has perfected my education*" (reported by Ibn Sam'ani in *Adab Al 'imla*).

When Aisha, the Prophet's wife, was asked about the Prophet's morality, she said : "*His ethics is the Qur'an*" (reported by Muslim, Abu Dawud and Ibn Hanbal). This means that the Prophet (MAPBUH) represented in his practical life the most perfect model for the realization of the ethics and morality preached by the Holy Qur'an. This clearly signifies that Islamic moral principles and value, despite their elevation and ideality, are always realizable in the practical life of people.

While still a child, El Hassan Ben Ali (MABH) came in on the Prophet at the time he was prostrating in prayer and rode on his back. The Prophet slowed down his prostration till El Hassan got down. When he finished his prayer, some of his companions asked him : "*O! Messenger of Allah. Why was your prostration so long ?*" He said : "*My son rode and I hated to rush him*" (Nisa'i's *Sanan* and Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad*).

The Prophet was once eating fresh dates with his right hand and putting the nuts in his left hand. A sheep passed by and he signalled to her with the nuts in his hands. She then started to eat from his left hand while he was eating from his right hand, till he finished. The sheep then went away (Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad*). Suffice it that he is the one who said : "*Whoever has no mercy on people, Allah will have no mercy on him*" (reported by Muslim).

Finally, ethics in Islam organizes almost all aspects of individual behavior. It comes all of it from Allah-fearing godliness, and the strong feeling that He is the Just Referee who harms nobody. Moral life has its basis on which it is founded, namely Divine Justice which punishes for a sin in accordance with its greatness and reward a good deed tenfold its value.

After having dealt with doctrine, rituals and ethics, we get now to the fourth basic element of Islam, i.e. legislation. Legislation is basically a set of laws and ordinances that organize the life of an individual and the Islamic community and determine the kind of punishment meted against the most important crimes.

Islamic legislation is very rich and varied. The science of jurisprudence took care of elucidating its various ordinances concerning worship (and how it is carried out), interactions and exchanges (financial

transactions like selling and buying, mortgage, guarantee etc.) and personal status (marriage, divorce, and inheritance), as well as the problems, social relations and the new conditions in every time and place.

Jurisprudence scholars and others have noticed how Islamic civilization is just and tolerant, taking people's interests into consideration without embarrassing them with difficult or unreasonable expenses. It is true that these were the reasons behind the fast expansion of Islam into countries with authentic civilizations that had old legal systems.

Islamic legislation covers all aspects of individual, family and social life. It also sets the bases and the principles propitious for founding a developed social polity and a prosperous and balanced economic activity.

The individual has the right to preserve his life, his religion, his honor and his money. The family has also its own coherent entity that should be respected; women deserve to be honored and respected. This respect involves giving her absolute freedom in choosing a husband, guaranteeing her civil rights during marriage and respecting her real desire for separation when there is a reason for that.

Politics in an Islamic society has got its specific goals, the most important of which is to ensure justice and equality among all members of society and to achieve security and stability, as well as preserve the teachings of religion from the oddities of frivolous people from inside and the perfidy of its enemies from outside. The meaning of politics is *shura* (consultation) which denotes the participation of everyone.

The basis of economy is respect for private property and ensuring loyal competition for the sake of the common good. Its regulations include forbidding usury, monopoly, and fighting corruption. If we add to this the resources coming through almsgiving and charity that could be used toward bettering the situation of the needy and the victims of disasters, we will notice that the economic system in Islam is a state-of-the-art social and moral system as well.

A few words on the punishment for crimes in Islam. These are retributions meant to fend off those who allow themselves to harm Muslims in their bodies, wealth or honor. It should be noted that Islam

contented itself in this context with determining retribution for crimes universally known to be of grave consequences on the building of an ideal society; it left other crimes to the discretion of governments and rulers to find the punishment that is most appropriate to each environment.

The crimes for which the Holy Qur'an defined punishments are five : killing (deliberate and by accident), highway robbery and brigandage, theft, fornication, and abusive language.

We have two remarks to make on Islamic forms of punishment. The first concerns establishing with certainty and beyond reasonable doubt that the person under question has intentionally committed the crime. The Prophet (MAPBUH) said : "*Try as much as you can to ward off legal punishments if there are doubts*" (reported by Ibn 'Adi and Sama'ani)⁽⁴⁾. This means that when in doubt, one should not punish.

In fact, this means that the circle of punishment is rendered as narrow as possible.

The second remark concerns the apparent severity of punishment. Islam weighs the form of punishment in relation to the size of the sin committed and the extent of its corrupting impact on the desirable ideal society it tries to establish. If we look at these crimes, we will find that they represent a clear infringement on the rights of society and contempt for its rules and systems.

Experience has shown that meeting Islamic retributions against the perpetrators of those crimes has given good results : it was a very effective means of warding off crimes and reducing the rate of violence. This should not prevent judges and rulers from taking into account attenuating circumstances surrounding the commitment of these crimes; this is required by law because it implies an objective and deep view of the concept of justice.

4. Those in charge have passed laws related to crimes not referred to in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition and have worked on retributions related to crimes, but the conditions of which are not yet complete if with the criminal remaining a danger on society. Religious scholars call this phenomenon as "concentration".

Finally, it should be noted that crimes and punishments take only a small part of Islamic legislation. A large part of Islamic legislation is concerned with establishing a set of political, economic and social systems based on ethical standards that set Islamic society off from other societies.

We should also mention here that in addition to the specific ordinances determined in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition, Islamic legislation comprises also a set of variables that give Muslims the opportunity throughout ages and in different contexts to deduce, in the light of those unchanging laws, ordinances that fit their interests. This gives Islamic Shari'a a great sense of flexibility, making of it a canon that is alive, progressive and applicable to all ages and all periods.⁽⁵⁾

In conclusion, we should emphasize the fact that Islam, which had assimilated all the teachings of previous divine religions, represents a doctrine that transcends the others; it does not seek to establish a state that fights other states. It is a total and universal religion that came to save humanity as a whole both in this world and in the hereafter. It addresses all human beings. Allah addressed Muhammad (PBUH) saying : "*We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not*" (Saba', 28). He also said : "*We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures*" (Anbiyya, 107).

5. Those in charge set up organizational laws for society in civil, commercial, administrative and international domains ... Religious scholars include under the general rubric of "legislative policy".

Allegations and Responses

The Allegation that the Origin of the Qur'an is Human, not Divine

It is historically true that Muhammad (MAPBUH) was an illiterate who did not know how to read or write. The Qur'an is a book of superb rhetorical complexity. It is completely different from the poetry and prose known among Arabs at that time. The Qur'an was a completely new and unprecedented linguistic and literary miracle. The fact that it came at the hands of an illiterate person is a proof that it is not of his own doing but is a revealed scripture.

The Qur'an contains a complete legal system made up of a doctrine, rites and ethics, as well as of political, economic and social systems. It aims to strike a balance between material and moral elements in the life of an individual and to establish a continuous relationship between the individual and society. This complete and distinguished legislative system could not originate in a person coming from a context like the simple and Bedwin Arab society where Muhammad (MAPBUH) used to live.

The Qur'an abounds with references to scientific truths that science has not discovered up until the modern era. It is impossible to find knowledge about facts in the rural environment where Muhammad grew. Here are some examples: references to the development of the fetus in his mother's uterus, to human imprints which are not the same from one being to another, to the movement of stars, to the origin and the development of the universe, to the constant interaction between different beings, as well as to the movement of the sun, the moon, winds, rain and vegetation.

Allah said : "*Man we did create from a quintessence (of clay), then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest firmly fixed; then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot we*

made a (fetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the Best to create!" (Al-Muminu, 12-19). He also said : "Does man think that We cannot assemble his bones ? Nay, We are able to put together in perfect order the very tips of his fingers." (Qiyamat, 3-4).

Allah also said : "*He has subjected the sun and the moon (to his Law)! Each one runs (its course) for a term appointed.*" (Ra'd, 2). He also said : "*It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day : each (just) swings along in (its own) orbit (according to Law)*" (Yasin, 40). He also said : "*Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one Unit of Creation), before we clove them asunder ? We made from water every living thing.*" (Anbiyya', 30). He also said : "*See thou not that God sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the earth ? Then he causes to grow, therewith, produce of various colours.*" (Zumar, 21). He also said : "*And We send the fecundating winds.*" (Al-Hijr, 22). He also said : "*He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together : between them is a barrier which they do not transgress.*" (Rahman, 19-20). He also said : "*And we sent down Iron, in which is (material for) mighty war, as well as many benefits for mankind.*" (Hadid, 25).

The Qur'an came to complete the previous divine scriptures (The Torah and the Bible) and to correct the distortions they were subject to. There are therefore common elements between the Qur'an and these books; but the Qur'an has many more things, such as Mary's labor and Zachary's protection of her, as well as the system of inheritance which has been so complete as to have remained unequalled until now. Concerning the correction of distortions, the Qur'an's representation of Allah is clear to everybody, based on deanthropomorphism (in the Torah there are expressions that are inappropriate to the deity like God's wrestling with Israel and the defeat of the latter at the hands of God; Christianity also contains the concept of trinity and the notion that Jesus is God's son.)

The Qur'an has dealt with the stories of early Prophets and the state of nations they were sent to as well as the outcome of their action. In this

context, Islam confirms many of the moral principles and social laws which have proved true and are still useful today. An example of this concerns the fact that changing society comes from an internal desire among its members to change. External factors come second and only serve as a back up : "*Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls).*" (Ra'd, 11).

The Qur'an also contained news relating to future events which would take place later as in "*The Roman Empire has been defeated, in a land close by; but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious, within a few years*" (Rum, 2-4). Those events took place in fact. Other examples include news about the future death of Abi Lahab and Walid Ibn Al Mughira without converting to Islam and believing in it, which actually took place : "*Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he! No profit to him from all his wealth and all his gains! Burnt soon will he be in a fire of blazing flame!*" (Lahab, 1-3) and "*Soon will I cast him into Hell-Fire! And what will explain to thee what Hell-Fire is ?*" (Muddaththir, 26-27).

Despite the length of the Holy Qur'an and the length of the time when it was revealed to Muhammad (MAPBUH) (twenty three years), a close study will show that there was no contradiction between its parts. The extreme precision in the choice of words and expressions shows clearly that it is beyond human capability.

The Qur'an challenges the Arabs, who were master rhetoricians, to come up with something similar to it, or even with ten Suras or even one. The result was that no one had ever been able to come up with a text comparable to the Qur'an, despite the fact that it had so many opponents who would be happy to come up with something similar. The fact that the challenge still holds is a proof that it is a divine, not a human, book.

Reliable historical sources show that Muhammad (MAPBUH) used to go through a very special state of mind and body at the time of revelation. He used to sweat a lot, which was something that all his friends used to notice. After that, he used to calm down and start to dictate what was revealed to some of his companions who were known

under the name of "revelation scribes" and were twenty nine. It is clear that the Qur'an was distinguished in its system and style from Muhammad's Traditions, the set of sayings that emanated from him personally. He used to forbid his companions to write it down so that it did not get mixed up with the Qur'an, Allah's words.

Of the greatest things that the Qur'an contains : the purification of the deity from aspects of polytheism and paganism; the consideration of all prophets as rings in a single chain, all of whom came to the guidance of humanity as a whole : "*the same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah, which We have sent by inspiration to thee, and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus; namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein*" (Shura, 13); and finally, the emphasis on the unity of humanity and the honor of everybody living on it, while refusing all forms of segregation based on color, origin, or social position, etc. All of this signifies that the Qur'an is a divine book that is so noble as to transcend human authorship, and so great as to be impossible for any environment to produce.

The Allegation that the Qur'an was not Collected During the Prophet's Lifetime, that it was the Companions who Wrote it down and Classified it, and that Uthman Ben Affan Burnt all the Copies that were Different from his Own

It is historically true that the Qur'an was all of it learnt by heart by a large number of Companions at the time of the Prophet (MAPBUH) and that he revised it with them before his death, after which he recited it twice to Jibril (Peace be upon him) as a whole and in its final classification in Ramadan.

As for its writing down, the Prophet (MAPBUH) used to dictate to some of his Companions called "Revelation Scribes" what was revealed to him directly. They used to write it down on anything that was available to them then (pieces of hide, palm leaves and camel bones).

One year after the death of the Prophet (MAPBUH), seventy of the learners of the Qur'an died in the Yamama battle. As a result, the Caliph Abu Bakr charged Zayd Ben Thabit to form a committee whose task was to collect the documents containing the Qur'an in the possession of the Revelation Scribes. One of the conditions that Zayd Ben Thabit put was not to accept any verse unless two persons testified that it was written following dictation from the Prophet (MAPBUH) himself.

These documents were collected into a Mushaf (a book) and given to Abu Bakr who gave them to 'Umar Ben El Khattab at the former's death; 'Umar gave the book at his death to Hafsa, the mother of all believers, because she was skilled in reading and writing.

At the time of 'Uthman Ben Affan's Caliphate, many non-Arabs converted to Islam. The result was differences in pronouncing the Qur'an. 'Uthman asked Zayd Ben Thabet to form a committee to write a book based on the version in the possession of Hafsa. The Committee made five copies and sent them to Mecca, El Medina, Basra, Kufa and Damascus. At the same time, the committee revised its work on the basis

of what the learners had learnt of the Qur'an in the very manner it was pronounced at the time of the Prophet (MAPBUH). This is the version that has been in common use up till the present and among all Islamic sects without exception.

It is clear that Muslims extremely strove not to change any word or letter or not even the vocable of a letter in 'Uthman's version. All other versions were burnt, while copies of this version were made and sent to Cheikhs who were responsible of teaching the Qur'an in the provinces.

Some Western scholars claim that the Companion Abdellah Ibn Mas'ud was opposed to burning his own version. The fact is that Ibn Mas'ud burnt his own version himself and joined the Muslims' consensus with regard to Uthman's version, which has up till now been received by the Islamic community as a whole and with complete acceptance and approval.

The Allegation that the Prophet (MAPBUH) Used to Change his Tactics in Accordance with the Conditions; hence he Presented Islam in Mecca as an Arabic Religion, then when he Won in El Medina, he Turned it into a Universal Religion

Since its very beginning, Islam states clearly that it is a universal religion, which came to save all human beings and that Muhammad came as a harbinger of glad and bad tidings for all the worlds.

At the time when Muhammad (MAPBUH) was ordered to declare his message to people in Mecca, he went on a high hill and spoke to people : "*I am Allah's messenger to you particularly as well to all people.*"

Anyone who reads the verses of the Qur'an carefully will see clearly that the Qur'an is addressed to all humanity. This universal dimension is clear in many of the verses revealed in Mecca before the migration to El Medina, especially in al Furqan Sura which was revealed in Mecca : "*Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion to His Servant, that it may be an admonition to all creatures*" (Furqan, 1) and in the Meccan Sura of Al Anbiyya (107) : "*We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures*" and in the Meccan Sura of Ibrahim : "*Here is a Message for mankind*" (Ibrahim, 52).

Suffice it that the Sura which serves as an introduction to the Qur'an, which is Al-Fatiha begins with : "*Praise be to Allah, the God of the World,*" which was a Sura that was revealed in Mecca before migration and before the Muslims set up a state in El Medina.

From what precedes, it becomes clear that the change in strategies should be understood in terms of gradualism in legislation. It is highly natural that the Prophet (MAPBUH) behaves in the Meccan Era, when he was under the pressure of infidels, in a manner that was different from his behavior during the Medinian era when the traits of a new state were beginning to take shape. At the beginning of this small state, the Prophet (MAPBUH) sent letters to the kings and rulers of the world asking them to convert to Islam, which was considered a religion for humanity as a whole.

The Allegation that Muhammad (MAPBUH) was a Lascivious Man, as can be Made Clear from his Marrying so Many Wives

This allegation suffers from the lack of consideration of the Prophet's well-documented biography before the mission and after it. We will respond to this allegation in detail.

Muhammad (MAPBUH) lived all his childhood and youth in Mecca. He was known at that period to be truthful, trustworthy and upright, at the time when young men of his age were immersed in the sensual desires that prevailed in Mecca at that time like drinking, womanizing and gambling. It is true that he did not get involved in any of these mischiefs.

When he reached the age of twenty-five, he married Khadija who was forty years old then and who had been married twice before then. He got most of his sons and daughters from her; he lived with her as his only wife till she died; he grieved over her death a lot. He remained for a while without marriage; it was proposed to him that he get married to another one but he apologized, giving as a reason his small daughters' need of his care. Then, he was urged to marry Sawda bint Zam'a, the widow of one of his Companions, who was not known to be particularly beautiful.

After Muhammad (MAPBUH) settled in El Medina, and starting from the age of fifty four, the period of polygamy began for reasons that are completely known and which are all far from being motivated by the alleged physical and lascivious desires. Of these marriages, we cite the example of his marrying Aisha, the daughter of his closest friend Abu Bakr Esseddiq (MABH), and his marriage to Hafsa (MABH), the daughter of his second friend, 'Umar Ben El Khattab (MABH), as well as his marriage of a Jewish woman (Safia) and a Coptic woman (Maria) from Egypt, who converted to Islam after marrying him. This marriage had positive effects, consisting of making friendship and strengthening relationships with his wives' families and tribes.

Of the legal factors behind some of the Prophet's marriage, we can cite his marrying Zaynab Bent Jahsh, who was married to his adoptive son Zayd Ben Haritha (the Arab custom had it before then that the father should not marry the adoptive son's wife after she got divorced). Then the Qur'anic verse was revealed to the Prophet (MAPBUH) ordering him to marry Zaynab in order to abrogate this custom. Allah says : "*Then when Zayd had dissolved (his marriage) with her, with the necessary formalities, we joined her in marriage to thee : In order that (in future) there may be no difficulty to the Believers in (the matter of) marriage with the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have dissolved with the necessary formalities with them. And God's command must be fulfilled*" (Al Ahzab, 37).

Finally, we find the human factor which consists of the Prophet's (MAPBUH) marrying women whose husbands were dead or killed (in battle) and who had no protector. It is common knowledge that in a rural environment it is very difficult for a lonely woman to live without a guardian. It is also true that some of these women were old and were not desired for their beauty at all, which proves that the motivation behind the Prophet's marriage was for purely humane reasons.

This shows that there are various phases in the Prophet's life. First, the premarital phase (up until 25 years of age), in which he was an example of the straight and committed young man who used to keep away from sensual pleasures. Then came the phase of monogamy with Khadija (for about 25 years), and then with Sawda bint Zum'a (4 years). The last phase (from the age of 54 to 63) was the period of polygamy, the cause of which are, as we have seen, social, legal and human.

Add to this the fact that the Prophet's life at home is completely known especially that his wives have left us with a minute and detailed description. All the details show that he used to pray a lot and to stay late to worship. He was reported to be concerned during the day with imparting the revelation and running Muslims' daily matters and following up on the building of the new state. It is clear, therefore, that these concerns are incompatible with the lascivious person he is alleged to be.

The Allegation that the Second Source of Islam (the Prophetic Traditions) is Doubtful because it Contains Apocryphal Sayings

The Prophet's role consists first in imparting the Qur'an in all sincerity and precision in realization of Allah's saying : "*O Apostle! Proclaim the (Message) which hath been sent to thee from thy lord*" (Ma'ida, 67) and in explaining the Qur'an. Allah says "*And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought*" (Nahl, 667).

This means that the Prophetic Tradition is the second source of Islam. What is historically certain is that the Prophet's (MAPBUH) Companions used to learn by heart his words, acts and reports.⁽¹⁾ When some of them tried to write them down during his lifetime, he forbade them at first in order not to get them mixed up with the text of the Holy Qur'an, at a time when writing was done on palm branches, animal hide and the shoulder bones of animals.

As a result, Muslims afterwards decided not to write down the Prophetic Traditions. When the opponents of Islam started conspiring against it by forging sayings and relating them to the Prophet, the Umayyad Caliph, 'Umar ben Abdelaziz (d. 101 H.) urged Muslim 'Ulama to assemble authentic Prophetic Sayings. They then went out in all devotion to gather the Prophetic Traditions from anyone who had learnt part of it before. Imam Malik played an important role in this context when he wrote a book called "Al Muwatta'", which is a set of sayings classified in a theological manner.

This was followed by a minute investigation of these reporters' lives. Their allegations of these sayings to the Prophet (MAPBUH) were also subjected to severe scrutiny. Their claims of reference were examined and looked at in a critical manner. By so doing, Muslim 'Ulama established

1. Reports refer to what used to happen in the presence of the Prophet (MAPBUH) without him opposing them. They became, therefore, as if he had said them.

two of the most important sciences which have preserved the Prophetic Traditions from falsification and change : 1) The Science of Impugnement and Justification which specializes in investigating the reporters' lives, their trustworthiness, their sense of justice or meticulousness, as well as their prevarication, forgetfulness or inadvertence. 2) The Science of the Terminology of Traditions, which gives a detailed description of the degree of truthfulness, authenticity, weakness, falsification, addition, etc. in each Prophetic Saying.

The Third Century (of the Hijir Calendar) knew the biggest scientific movement in the publication of encyclopedias containing authentic Prophetic Traditions. Of the most famous Ulama of this movement, we mention Al Bukhari (d. 256 H.) and Muslim (d. 261 H.) who gathered what they considered authentic from among tens of thousands of sayings which were circulating then. Others include Ibn Hanbal (d. 241 H.), Ibn Majah (d. 273 H.), Abu Dawud (d. 275 H.), Tarmidhi (d. 279 H.), and Nisai' (d. 303 H.)

With this great work, of which we find no parallel in any other culture, the Muslims managed to set up a Prophetic Tradition on the basis of which a theological jurisprudence specializing in the ordinances relating to individuals and society was founded.

We should note here what some Muslim Ulama did : they wrote books devoted to apocryphal and inauthentic "sayings" in order to alert Muslims to them. Therefore, it is not shameful to say that a Prophetic Saying is weak or forged; what is shameful is to know it and take it for an authentic one. All Muslims acknowledge that when a saying is proved authentic, it becomes necessary to apply its contents, in accordance with Allah's saying : "*So take what the Apostle assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you*" (Hashr, 7).

The Allegation that there is no Need to Follow Prophetic Sayings because they are full of Contradictions

A good part of the Prophetic Tradition explains the Qur'an and uncovers quite a few of its meanings. The Prophet (MAPBUH) was the first one to understand the contents of the Qur'an and explain it to people. There is therefore a basic rule which says that an authentic tradition is never opposed to the Qur'an.

It has never been confirmed that authentic sayings are in contradiction with each other. The allegation of contradiction may be due to :

1. A possible contradiction between an authentic saying and an inauthentic saying. The inauthentic is abandoned for the sake of the authentic.
2. It may be a contradiction between two sayings one of which abrogates the other, as in the Prophet's (MAPBUH) saying : "*I urged you not to visit cemeteries; but now I allow you to do so*" (reported by Muslim.) He also forbade them from doing ablutions with anything that had touched fire after having urged them to do so (reported by Muslim).

Sometimes the contradiction is only on the surface. After studying and examining the meanings of the two sayings and understanding their historical contexts, this contradiction fades away.

Muslim scholars devoted various books to explaining in detail these points. Of these we cite the ***Risalah*** of Imam Shaafi'i (d. 204 H.) and Ibn Qutaybah's (d. 267 H.) ***The Interpretation of Prophetic Tradition***.

The Allegation that Islam Got Spread out with the Sword, always Preceded by Victorious Armies

The Qur'an states clearly that, "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" (Baqara, 256); "*Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)*" (Kahf, 29); "*therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish. Thou are not out to manage (men's) affairs*" (Ghashiya, 21-22); "*If then they turn away, we have not sent thee as a guard over them. Thy duty is but to convey (The Message)*" (Shura, 48); "*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*" (Nahl, 125).

As for the practical application of this method, it is remarked that Muslims followed it to a great extent. Evidence can be found in what follows :

- At the early stages of Islam, a large number of poor and weak people believed in Muhammad's message. They were subjected to all kinds of corporal torture so that they would renege, but still they persevered in their beliefs. Some of them preferred to migrate to Ethiopia first and then to El Medina second to giving up the new religion. Where does the sword come in this phase ?
- A large number of notables and famous persons who could not by any stretch of the imagination have been converted by force (examples : Abu Bakr, 'Umar Ben El Khattab, Talha, Zoubeir, Sa'ad ben Abi Waqqas, Hamza, Mus'ab, Abderrahman ben 'Awf (May Allah Bless them all).

When the Muslims moved to El Medina, they found an environment propitiate for the building of a state which was always subject to acts of aggression both from outside and from inside. Muslims found themselves forced to defend themselves. Fighting was permitted as a means of self-defense : "*To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight) because they are wronged; -and verily, God is Most Powerful for their aid*" (Hajj, 39).

When Muslims left the Arabian Peninsula to spread out the message, they found the neighbouring peoples suffering under the oppression of regional forces. They felt compelled to declare wars on these. If they won, they applied the teaching of Islam consisting of spreading Allah's message with advice and persuasion. They never forced anyone to convert to Islam. The proof is that the Copts of Egypt have kept their religion until today. Nobody has ever forced them to give it up. The Jews also have lived in Islamic societies without anyone pressuring them to convert to Islam.

After all, the countries which have converted to Islam without the help of Islamic armies are galore : in South East Asia and in Eastern and Central Africa. Indonesia for example contains 180 million Muslims but has never been invaded by a Muslim army.

What refutes the allegation that Islam spreads out by force is the fact that Muslims went through periods of weakness following their victories. Nevertheless, they remained Muslims. This means that they converted to Islam out of pure individual choice.

Finally, Islam is spreading out on a daily basis in all continents, including Europe and America, without there being any use of force. This is all happening at a moment when the means used by Muslims are very weak as is clear to everyone.

The Allegation that Islamic Conquests are in fact no more than Colonial Expansions Motivated by Economic Interests (to get booty and levy taxes)

A striking difference should be made between the principles of Islam and the behavior of some Muslims, which is incompatible with these principles. Islam states clearly that it is a religion of mercy which came to save humanity and wean them away from idolatry and the worshipping of persons to the belief in the unicity of Allah. Islam never called upon its followers to wage wars except as means of self-defense.

Islamic conquests were not colonial designed to exploit the wealth of other nations. The aim was to convey the Islamic message to these people. The wars waged by Muslims were against armies standing as obstacles to the transmission of the message.

Modern colonialism has had bad effects on the colonized countries. Islamic conquests, on the contrary, used to change the lands they reached from a state of underdevelopment to a state of prosperity and civilization. Evidence can be found in what happened in Spain and Portugal, which were transformed after the Islamic conquest to a prosperous center of civilization, with positive effects on Europe as a whole.

It is wrongly stated that Islamic Jihad aims at getting booty. But Islam considers that a crime. When the Prophet (MAPBUH) was asked about a man who wanted to go on Jihad with the aim of getting material benefits, he said : "*There would be no reward for him [from Allah].*" He said it three times (Abu Dawud's *Sanan*). It was reported that "Umar Ben Abdelaziz (d. 101 H.) said that Allah sent Muhammad as a savior and not as a tax collector. The goal behind the holy war was to break the strength of any ruler who prevents the message from getting to people who have the right to know about this final religion. Many of these rulers were planning on destroying the new Islamic state.

As for the Jizyah, it is a very small tax paid by non-Muslims in the conquered lands in return for their protection and their defense when they

do not join the army. If they do, the Jizayah becomes non-applicable. It is noticed that Jizayah was levied only against those capable of fighting. Old people, women, children and the scholars of other religions were exempted.

What proves the integrity of early Muslims was the fact that a large number of them were wealthy before converting to Islam, but, nevertheless, after the Islamic conquests they became pious and ascetic, living a very simple life, devoid of luxury and worldly pleasures.

The Allegation that Muslims were Peoples who did not Respect Old Civilizations, an Example of which was the Burning of the Alexandria Library

It is not true at all that Muslims lacked respect for older civilizations. On the contrary, they benefited from all the positive elements in these civilizations, as is clear from their translation of Greek, Persian and Indian books, out of their belief in the unity of human tradition. It was reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said : "*Wisdom is the goal of the believer; whenever he finds it, he takes it*" (Tarmidhi's *Sanan*). Among the most common proverbs among Muslims : "*Seek knowledge even if it is in China*", meaning even in a very far and non-Muslim land like China.

The Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 595 H.) expressed the Islamic attitude to old civilizations when he said : "*Islamic laws compel us to consult the books of antiquity since their aim is the very aim that Islamic law urges us to seek. We should read what they have said and stated in their books. Whatever is compatible with truth, we will accept, like, and be grateful to them for. Whatever is incompatible, we will draw attention to and warn against, excusing them for their errors.*"

It is noticed that the claim that Muslims burnt the Alexandria Library did not appear till the thirteenth century AD., at the time of anti-Islamic crusades. It is therefore no more than a piece of psychological propaganda. It is historically confirmed that this library was burnt by the Romans, centuries before the coming of Islam.

How could 'Umar Ben El Khattab (MABH) be accused of burning the Alexandria library, while being the one who had protected Christian convents in Sham and Al-Qods. These convents were full of Syrian translations of Greek books. Muslims benefited greatly from these books at the time of the Abbasids and after.

The German Orientalist Sigfried Hunke showed in her book, *Allah is Totally Different*, that when the Arabs got into Alexandria in 642 AD.,

there was no library in Alexandria. It had already been burnt centuries before then. She also showed that the old library which was adjacent to the Academy, built in Alexandria by Ptolmey I about 300 BC. was burnt down in 47 BC. when Julius Ceasar set a siege to the city. Cleopatra rebuilt the library and provided it with books from Bergammon.

The third century AD. knew the beginning of the organized destruction of the library. The Roman Emperor Caligula closed the Academy and religious fanatics destroyed the library in 272 AD. considering it a pagan activity. In 391 AD. Cardinal Theophylos managed to get a permission from the Roman Emperor Theodysius to destroy the remaining Academy and burn the library adjunct to it, which used to contain more than 300 thousand scrolls of books. The aim was to build a church and a convent instead of it. The destruction went on in the fifth century in the form of raids on pagan scholars and on their places of worship as well as on their library. This shows that Muslims were clearly not guilty of the destruction of the library.

Finally, how could it be said that Muslims are against books and libraries at a time when their scientific and literary writings, in the form of handwritten manuscripts, still fill in important corners of world libraries ?

The Allegation that Islam is a Religion that Does not Only Allow the Use of Reason but Makes it Subject to Religious Texts

Islam is a religion which gives a lot of importance to reason. Reason is the source of the sense of responsibility and accountability. With it, man defines his Creator and gets to know the secrets of creation and the greatness of the Creator. The Qur'an addresses man's reason and urges him to look at the universe, contemplate it and study it for the good of all humanity and in order to learn how to build the earthly civilization, both materially and morally. There is nothing in Islam that contradicts reason or is against the verities of science.

Islam urges man to use his reason and reprimands those who do not use their perceptive powers, especially their minds. Therefore, the Qur'an considers these, people who have given up their humanity. Allah says : "*They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided; for they are heedless (of warning)*" (A'raf, 179). The Qur'an considers the non-use of reason a sin. Therefore, this is how it describes infidels on the Day of Judgment : "*They will further say : 'Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we should not (now) be among the Companions of the Blazing Fire!'*" (Mulk, 10).

Islam draws man's attention to the fact that Allah has put the whole universe at his disposal. His duty, therefore, is to use his reason for the sake of benefiting from everything for the good of humanity and the settlement of the earth. "*It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein*" (Hud, 61). "*And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in heavens and on earth : behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect*" (Jathiya, 13).

The whole universe is, therefore, the element wherein human reason should reign sovereign without censorship or thought control, especially that it is used for the sake of humanity as a whole. Islam encourages whatever is beneficial for human beings.

Religious texts in Islam are binding to Muslims especially in so far as sources and religious laws are concerned. But the Muslim is free to use his reason in relation to worldly matters. This is what the Prophet (MAPBUH) implies in his statement : "*You are the ones who know better about your worldly matters*" (reported by Muslim). The space open for the freedom of thought and scientific research is wide and guaranteed for every Muslim. The Prophet was ordered to ask for more knowledge : "*Say, 'O my Lord! advance me in knowledge*" (Taha, 114). The Qur'an has praised a lot the values of scholars and knowledge : "*God will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degree), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) Knowledge*" (Mujadila, 11). It has also warned against ignorance : "*Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know ?*" (Zumar, 9).

It was reported that the Prophet said: "*Seeking knowledge is a must for every Muslim*" (Ibn Majah's Sanan). He also said : "*Whoever takes a road to knowledge, Allah will make it easy for him to go to paradise*" (reported by Al Bukhari). He showed its value and its impact even after death : "*If a man dies his work stops except for three things : a running charity, a useful knowledge, or a good son who will pray for him*" (reported by Muslim).

The Allegation that Islam calls for its Followers to be Lazy and not to Look for Reasons

Whoever contemplates the Holy Qur'an will get the confirmation that Islam is a religion that greatly urges people to work. Work is life and without work life stops. Therefore, the Qur'an in quite a few verses relates belief to good work, the latter being any work carried out by man, be it religious or worldly, which aims at seeking Allah's pleasure, procuring benefits to human beings or warding evil off. The order to work is unambiguously clear in the Qur'an : "*And say : 'Work (righteousness) : Soon will God observe your work, and His Apostle, and the Believers'*" (Taubah, 105). The Qur'an urges Muslims to work even on Friday which is considered a weekly holiday for Muslims. Allah says : "*And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land'*" (Jumu'a, 10).

The Prophet urges people to work till the last moment of their life or the last moment of the world. Hence his saying : "*If the Day of Judgement comes and you have a small tree in your hand, and you cannot arise till you plant it, then do so'*" (Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad*).

The Prophet refused some people's devotion to prayer only and their dependence on others to get food and drink. He praised those who work and earn their living with their hands. He praised the working hand as a hand liked by Allah and his Prophet.

The Prophet (MAPBUH), who served and serves as a model for all Muslims, works, plans, and studies all aspects of everything, prepares and gets ready for everything, always considers the causes before doing anything, without forgetting to ask for Allah's assistance. Seeking Allah's assistance does not mean forsaking work or not considering causes; it's the next step after the preparation of everything. This call for Allah's help makes man remember Allah and get supplied with a spiritual energy which makes him more capable to overcome difficulties and face problems with unwavering tenacity. Seeking Allah's assistance is, therefore, a positive force. It is neither a negative force nor a sense of laziness.

Dependence and fatalism means not to take causes into consideration and not to work, considering that Allah will do everything according to His will. This is something unacceptable in Islam. Allah does not help those who do not help themselves; He is with those who work : "*Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves*" (Ra'd, 11).

'Umar Ben El Khattab (MABH) expelled some fatalists who were devoted to prayer only in a mosque, depending on others for their living. It is at this time that he said his famous saying : "*Heavens does not rain gold or silver.*" He quoted the Prophet who said : "*If you depend on Allah in the right manner, He will give you the same gift He gives birds who go out with empty stomachs and come back with full stomachs*" (reported by Tarmidhi), which means : work following the example of birds who go out in the morning looking for food with empty stomachs and come back in the evening with full stomachs.

The Allegation that the Position of Women is Low and that their Rights are not Ensured

When Islam came, the situation of women was very bad. They did not have any rights or value. Islam rescued them from these bad conditions and raised them to a high status. It relieved them of the injustice they were subject to and made them feel important and equal to men. It also guaranteed them their legitimate rights. It absolved them from the guilt of luring Adam in paradise and of being the source of evil in the world. Islam showed that it was Satan who lured both Adam and Eve, as is stated in the following Qur'anic verse : "*Then did Satan make them slip from the (Garden), and get them out*" (Baqara, 36).

Islam states that all people, men and women, were created from the same soul : "*O mankind! reverence Your Guardian. Lord, who created you from a single Person*" (Nisaa, 1).

Man and woman are completely equal in human considerations; none of them has any advantages over the other. Allah's honoring of humans in His saying : "*We have honored the sons of Adam*" (Bani Isra'il, 70) is an honoring of man and woman alike.

When the Holy Qur'an speaks of man or the sons of Adam, it means both men and women. But if it wants to refer to anyone of them singly, then it would use the terms "men" and "women."

The Prophet (MAPBUH) described the relationship between men and women in the following way : "*Women are men's sisters; they have rights as well as duties, all in just and reasonable terms*" (Tarmidhi's ***Sanan***). The use of the word "sisters" shows clearly the equality between them. For Allah, men and women are equal except in the good work each of them may do. As Allah says in the Qur'an : "*Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions*" (Nahl, 97). Allah responds

to the prayer of both men and women : "*And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them : 'Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female : Ye are members, one of another'*" (Al-Imran, 195). The Qur'anic expression "one of another" means that each of them complements the other and that life cannot be stable without their mutual collaboration.

Islam has urged women to get education; it has even made it an obligation as in the Prophet's (MAPBUH) saying : "*Seeking knowledge is a Muslim man's and woman's duty*" (Ibn Majah's ***Sanan***). It has also guaranteed them the right to work; there is no single text in Islam which forbids it. Muslim women have worked in all kinds of fields, which proves that Islam has guaranteed women a financial source of income that makes them independent from men.

After this basic Islamic attitude toward women found in two indubitably reliable sources of Islam, i.e. the Qur'an and the Tradition, how could a fair man accuse Islam of oppressing women and abrogating their rights ? The fact of the matter is that this conception contains a confusion between Islam as a religion with its own tolerant teachings on the one hand and the behavior and the attitude of a few Muslims towards women. An objective evaluation of Islam should make a difference between the two. The low status of women in Islamic societies is not due to the teachings of Islamic societies but to people's ignorance or their pretense not to know.

The Allegation that Women in Islam are Dependent on Men

Islam has given women complete economic independence from men. They are absolutely free to do whatever they want (sell, buy, give or invest) with their wealth without permission from the husbands, as long as they are capable of running their own business. Neither a woman's husband nor any of her relatives has the right to take away any of her property or wealth without her permission.

No man, even if he is the father, is allowed to force his daughter to marry a man she does not like. Marriage should take place only upon her agreement and acceptance. A girl came to the Prophet (MAPBUH) complaining that her father married her to his nephew despite the fact that she did not like him. The Prophet called the father and gave the girl the freedom to accept or refuse the proposed marriage. She then decided of her own will to accept the marriage and said : "*O Messenger of Allah. I have accepted what my father has done; yet I wanted to teach women that fathers have no control over these matters*" (Abu Dawud's *Sanan*), meaning that fathers cannot force their daughters to marry.

A man and a woman collaborate in building a home and educating the kids. It is not reasonable to expect life to be tolerable if there were no contribution from both sexes; otherwise, the balance within the family will break, with negative effects on children. The Prophet (MAPBUH) made both men and women responsible when he said : "*Every one of you is a shepherd and each shepherd is responsible for his or her herd. An Imam is a shepherd who is responsible for his herd; a man is a shepherd of his family who is responsible for his herd; and a woman is a shepherdess in her husband's home and is therefore responsible for her herd*" (Reported by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tarmidhi, and Ibn Hanbal).

The fact that woman is supposed to assume responsibilities abrogates the accusation of her being dependent on man. There could be no responsibility without freedom and freedom is incompatible with dependence.

A husband is not allowed to deprive a woman of her legitimate rights in life; he should not forbid her from going to the mosque for worship. It was reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said : "*Do not prevent women from going to mosques*" (reported by Muslim). If a few Muslims who stick to old customs or wrong habits do not abide by these Islamic attitudes to women, that is certainly considered an ignorance of Islamic ordinances and a misunderstanding of Islam's clear teachings.

What shows the lack of dependence is the fact that a Muslim woman preserves her maiden name even after marriage, and does not take her husband's name as is the custom in the West.

The Allegation that Islam is Unfair to Women by Giving them half the Share of a Man in Inheritance

This is a detail that is often misunderstood. The system of inheritance in Islam is a complete whole that should be looked at from all its different aspects. The cases when a woman inherits only half of what the husband inherits are four only. There are about twenty cases in which a woman's situation will be as follows :

1. She could inherit the same as a man gets in some cases.
2. She could take more than the husband in other cases.
3. She could sometimes inherit, while her male counterpart would not.

The system of inheritance is related in Islam to the system of the family as a whole. The husband is responsible primarily for taking care of his wife and children. A married woman does not have that responsibility. A man's responsibilities are bigger than those of a woman.

If there are specific cases in which a woman needs extra financial help, through selling or gifts, that could be arranged while the bequeather is still alive.

Because they find that the Islamic system of inheritance is fair, many Copts in Egypt use it as a reference in finding solutions for problems related to inheritance.

Why Does Islam Make the Testimony of Two Women Equal to That of One Man ?

This is true only of cases of transactions and documentation : *“And if there are not two men, then a man and two women.”* (Baqara, 282). There are other situations where the testimony of one woman is equal to that of one man. Moreover, in cases involving women issues only, a woman's testimony is sufficient since a man's is not even acceptable. The Qur'an showed the reason behind seeking the testimony of two women along with a man : *“Each of them will remind the other”*, women's experience with transactions being lower than that of men, especially that they tend to forget. In any case, this should not prevent judges and rulers from taking into consideration all the circumstances surrounding a case or prevailing in society in general, especially with regard to the rapid fundamental changes taking place in life in general.

In addition, this rule which is applicable in one special situation does not necessarily mean that a woman is viewed as an inferior being. The primary concern behind such a rule is merely to confirm the validity of a testimony, as it is with other crime cases where the testimony of four men is required, and where, here again, the purpose is not to jeopardize the integrity of the witnesses but simply to be reassured about the truth of the testimony. It is Allah who stipulates that : *"If any of your women commit fornication, call in four witnesses from among yourselves against them."* (Nisa,'15) And He also states : *"Those that defame honorable women and cannot produce four witnesses shall be given eighty lashes."* (Nur, 4)

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that medical research has proved that, for a few days each month, a woman is not in her normal mental and psychological states.

The Allegation that Islam does not Allow Women to Hold High State Positions

Islam does not prohibit a woman from holding important state positions as long as she is qualified. Not only is there no single Qur'anic verse which denies women important state positions but, on the contrary, the Qur'an cites the example of the Queen of Saba' who held the highest state position in her society.

As for the saying of the Prophet (MAPBUH) in which he states that : "*They who submit their matters to the care of women are doomed to failure*", (reported by al-Bukhari, at-Tarmidhi, an-Nissan and Ibn Hanbal), it must be contextualized to determine the specific situation in which it was said. The Prophet (MAPBUH) made this statement when it was reported to him that the Persians, who were then enemies of Islam, enthroned Kissra's daughter. This shows that the Prophet (MAPBUH) was primarily seeking to elevate the spirits of the Muslims and that he meant specific people.

It is also a fact that the Caliph 'Umar Ben El Khattab assigned the responsibility of the accounting department (which included the management of the El Medina's trade center) to Shifa'a Bint Abdullah al-Makhzumia; it must be noted that this is one of the civil and religious functions which requires high expertise and firmness.

If today, some societies treat women differently, this is due to the prevailing local customs and mores and not because of the dictates of Islam.

The evolution that Muslim countries have been experiencing has made it possible for women to hold some of the highest state positions such as that of Prime Minister (as in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey) or that of a Minister or Ambassador (as in Egypt).

The Allegation that Islam Forces a Woman to Wear the Veil, a Fact Which Prevents Her From Education and Employment

Islam has bestowed honor upon both men and women. As a matter of fact, it is a sign of the honorable position a woman holds that she is asked to conceal her body so that she could ward off the harm of the sick and the deviant. However, it is not required that a woman conceals her face, which is the sign of her femininity, nor that her dress impedes her movements. As long as it is ethically acceptable and does not make of her an enticement to temptation, a woman can dress elegantly.

It should be remembered that veil-wearing is also one of the virtues of Christianity. The New Testament requires a woman cover her hair when praying (the eleventh chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the People of Corinth) while the Christian nuns are required to wear the veil. Also, whether she is a celebrity or the wife of the head of a state, any woman who is to meet the Pope must cover her hair.

However, if one finds that some Muslim women today go as far as to conceal their faces and arms, that is primarily due to the customs and traditions which are specific to some Muslim societies. A proof that the religion is not responsible for this excessive type of dress is that a Muslim woman must uncover her face when circumambulating the Kaaba (as part of the Islamic Pilgrimage ceremonies).

As for the claim that the veil impedes a woman's progress in education and work, it remains unfounded since a lot of Muslim women have performed the highest achievements in education and sciences. In fact, they have revealed extraordinary talents and creativity in their jobs as educators, doctors, nurses, administrators, etc. without the veil ever jeopardizing their progress.

The Allegation that the Veil Jeopardizes a Muslim Woman's Efficiency in Today's Modern World

It must be stated first that there is no Qur'anic text which describes what a typical Muslim dress should look like. There is simply recommendation that a woman should not make herself look desirable in the presence of male strangers so that she would not become their covetous object. It is, therefore, possible that the veil could take different forms and shapes depending on the traditions of each Muslim society and the type of work a woman does.

The ways in which a Muslim woman wears her veil today is a matter that nobody has imposed on her. On the contrary, that is a choice that she has herself made. Therefore, since she is not complaining, her choice must be respected as is the Indian woman's whose efficiency does not seem to be hindered by the Sari she wears. Moreover, the Egyptian woman has worked for thousands of years at home and in the fields dressed in the same veil she is still wearing today, not to mention that, even with the veil on, she has often been more efficient and energetic than her male counterpart. How would work be more productive if a woman uncovers her beauty ? If she is able to produce, what will happen to those among whose eyes are drawn to her beauty ? It is certain that some of them get preoccupied with the beautiful, elegant and attractive colleague and at least dreams of moments of romance with her, which will affect his productivity and leads to a mixing of serious work with fun in a context of productivity and efficiency.

The Allegation that Islam Calls upon Men to Marry more than One Woman, and even Four

Before the coming of Islam, men in Arabia had the right to marry more than one woman, without any constraints or conditions. Some men were married with ten or more women. When Islam came, it limited this right to a maximum of four women.

The truth is that Islam does not advocate polygamy; in fact, the Qur'an mentions polygamy favorably only once in the context of its dealing with the case of women orphans who grow up under the custody of one man. The Qur'an warns the latter against being unfair to them if he ever decides to marry them; fairness is a *sine qua non* condition of polygamy. If that is deemed unattainable, the man in question should content himself with only one woman. Allah says : "*If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one*" (Nisaa 3).

The Qur'an, however, warns in another context that the condition of fairness is almost impossible to achieve : "*Ye will never manage to deal equitably with women no matter how eager ye may be*" (Nisaa 129).

The norm in Islam is therefore monogamy; polygamy is the exception and is meant to be a remedy for specific cases and specific contexts.

It may happen that in some cases a large number of men are lost in war or that in some societies so many women remain unmarried for a long period of time.

There are cases where men feel that they should be faithful to their wives if these prove to be sterile or suffer from a chronic illness; they therefore decide to keep them under their protection -if the women so desire- when they decide to marry other women.

Westerners should not use their cultural tradition to protest a divine law revealed unto all mankind and applicable to all societies and valid for

all ages. It is worth noting that polygamy does not represent a problem in many an African or Arab society. It is an accepted tradition; polygamous men should be careful not to be unjust toward women nor to infringe upon their rights, the most fundamental of which being the right to ask for divorce when the husband chooses to marry another woman.

Finally, the West's repudiation of polygamy did not prevent Western men from having mistresses besides their wives and from having sex out of wedlock. This is a form of fornication that is forbidden in all divine religions.

The Allegation that Islam allows the Muslim Man to Marry a Non-Muslim Woman While it Prohibits the Marriage of a Muslim Woman from a Non-Muslim Man

Islam has the highest respect for peaceful cohabitation among all the members of the other heavenly religions and considers the belief in the messages of the Prophets who came prior to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) an essential component of a Muslim's faith. A Muslim man married to a Jewish or Christian must not prohibit his wife from carrying out her religious duties or from visiting the Synagogue or the Church. In fact, this is a clear evidence of the high respect and esteem Islam has for the freedom of human beings in choosing their own religion, ensuring that nobody imposes his religion on others with force.

As for forbidding the marriage of a non-Muslim man, even if he is from the People of the Book, it is due to the fact that Islam considers that people's beliefs have veered away from the teachings of previous Divine scriptures. Furthermore, human societies have always used (patrilineal) kinship systems and considered children to be at birth to follow their father's religion; therefore, the marriage of a non-Muslim man with a Muslim woman would mean imposing on helpless children something other than their natural religion, as is made clear by all divine scriptures, including Islam, the ultimate divine message. Islam has, therefore, reached the highest levels in realizing social cohesion while maintaining the Islamic foundations of society.

The Allegation that the Islamic Alms Create Unequal Opportunities Between the Rich and the Poor Muslims Before Allah, since the Rich Have Their Money to Help Them Aspire to a Better Reward

In Islam, the fundamental criterion to differentiate between people's positions and status is the amount and truthfulness of their good deeds and their obedience to the dictates of Allah. The Qur'an has made an explicit statement to this effect by saying that : "*The noblest of you in God's sight is he who is most righteous.*" (Al-Hujurat, 13)

It must be pointed out that in Islam, the value of deeds is primarily defined by the doer's intention and also, since relativity is a fundamental principle in all matters, it is very possible that a Muslim who is poor and gives for alms no more than one dirham or just a date might enjoy the same, or even a better, reward than someone who offers millions for almsgiving.

Moreover, Islam has given a more extended meaning to almsgiving and charity since these are not limited to the donation of money. In this respect, a good word is a charitable act, and so is the safekeeping of a road from potential harm, or the prayer of a Muslim for the safe return of his brother, and so is the reverence of one's parents, pursuing one's education or going out with the intention to make one's living or even a marriage intended to prevent one from committing adultery is also considered a charitable act. This is the import of the Prophet's response to poor people who asked him about the reward of charity that they are deprived of. Anyone right in his mind, knows that if a poor man shares his food with someone who needs it, his act will be considered by Allah more than an act of charity for a rich man would give a big sum as charity but that would not affect his capital nor would he feel any reduction in his fortune.

The Allegation that Islam's Prohibition of Pork is not Justified Since Pork is Like Any Other Animal

Though it is mentioned in different contexts, the Qur'an does not explain the reasons why pork is prohibited, as it never accounts for the reasons why the Tree in the Garden of Eden was forbidden for Adam. Therefore, Islam's prohibition of Pork must be taken as a divine order which must be obeyed.

It must also be noted that Islam is not the only heavenly religion which prohibits pork since pork is prohibited in the Old Testament too and, as it has been proved, it was Saint Paul who made it permissible for Christians to eat pork even though the Old Testament is also binding for Christians.

It is strange that the Muslim meets with disapproval when he turns down pork while nobody in Europe or the U.S.A. blames a Jew for refusing to eat pork.

Why Does Islam Prohibit Men From Wearing Gold and Silk ?

Islam prohibits men from wearing gold and silk because it is a religion which aims at building a society ruled by justice and equality and one where the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood prevails. It is very likely that the sight of a few men in pompous silk dress and expensive gold jewelry might break the heart of the poor, not to mention the possibility that those distinguished few may be misled into believing they are superior to the lot.

Also, since Islam makes of the respect for the feelings of the poor an obligation, there is a risk that provocative appearances might generate feelings of bitterness and hatred among the deprived, a fact which could threaten social stability and order.

In addition, gold and silk may induce in those who wear them a kind of gentleness and effeminacy which Islam fights in men who need to be tough to be able to face life's problems and to be up to the responsibilities they have to assume. Equally forbidden are furniture, decoration, China and silverware which are made of gold or silver. These are among the matters that nobody can deny the contribution of religion in controlling and the benefits that ensure from that control.

On the Claim that Islam is Against the Freedom of Belief Because it Permits the Killing of the Apostate

This claim is false because Islam calls for the respect of one's freedom of belief. This is made very clear in the Qur'an which states that : "*There shall be no compulsion in religion.*" (Baqara, 256) The affirmation of the freedom of belief is also to be taken as an acknowledgment of religious diversity. The Qur'an states that : "*You have your own religion and I have mine.*" (Al-Kafirun, 6)

Within the framework of this diversity, Islam guarantees the freedom of religious debates on an objective basis in which the beliefs of the others are respected. The Qur'an says : "*Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner.*" (Nahl, 125)

However, the apostate represents a special case within Muslim society. Not only does he not have a religion but also he has no respect for all religions since he would embrace one today only to attack it tomorrow. The Qur'an takes a very clear stand towards this type of unbelievers : "*Those who accept the Faith and then renounce it, who again embrace it and again deny it and grow in unbelief- God will neither forgive them nor rightly guide them.*" (Nisaa', 137)

However, no Qur'anic text indicates that the apostate must be killed and the Prophet's saying¹ in which he calls for the killing of the apostate must be contextualized. It seems that the Prophet's saying was addressed to the apostate who deserts the Muslim army during wartime and joins the camp of their enemies. Thus, it becomes clear that the Prophet's decision is no different from the laws instituted by all systems and which call for capital punishment for traitors who desert at wartime.

Moreover, it must also be noted that the process of carrying out the death sentence on the apostate is complex and very slow. Muslim

1. "*He who has disavowed his religion must be killed*", (reported by Al-Bukhari).

jurisprudence and theologians have argued that the apostate must publicly announce his apostasy from Islam and must also attack the foundations of Islam, deeds which would denote that he no longer adheres to the social norms and regulations. Upon this, he would be asked three times to renounce his harmful deeds, and it is only when he persists in his prejudiced attitudes against society's beliefs that his death becomes legitimate. Some theologians urge that the apostate be urged to repent a hundred times, out of consideration for the conditions of apostasy which are not conducive to destruction or social anarchy. In any case, the judge's power becomes wider in considering conditions and circumstances, especially when there is no consensus among theologians.

Finally, it must be remembered that all religions set mechanisms to protect themselves from those who seek their destruction or strive to blaspheme the beliefs and practices on which they are founded. As a case in point, the Church still applies the rule of "excommunication" to whoever deviates from its principles.

The Allegation that the stand Taken by Contemporary Muslims Towards Salman Rushdi Is Contrary to the Principles of the Freedom of Expression

A distinction must first be made between the freedom of expression and prejudice, especially when the case involves a religious belief practiced by about a billion people all over the world. What Salman Rushdi has done can rightly be viewed as a prejudiced stand against Muslims. Moreover, it has been made crystal clear that he was after money and fame. Literary critics have shown that, from a purely artistic perspective, his novel lacks the attributes of the great works of art, nor even those of average ones.

In addition, the Muslims' response to his case was not the same. It was the Shi'ite Iranian leader al-Khomeini who gave a fatwa (a formal legal opinion) regarding his assassination, while the Sunni Muslims used the media to express their indignation. The Egyptian Minister of Religious Affairs met with Rushdi and asked him to reconsider his disrespectful attitude towards Islam and its Prophet, but Rushdi refused and preferred to take the road of celebrity and fame rather than the straight path.

It must be noted that, before Rushdi, quite a few of the Orientalists who have studied Islam have made a number of allegations and claims against Islam and its Prophet (MAPBUH) and Muslim theologians have translated their works, analyzed them and responded to their allegations using the tools of logic and persuasion. This reveals the tolerant attitude of the majority of Muslims.

The Allegation that the Punishment set by the Islamic Law (Such as the Severing of the Thief's Hand and the Stoning of the Adulterer) Is Extremely Violent and Barbarous

Punishments are set to reprimand those who transgress the norms of society. As a social organization, Islam is set to safeguard the individual's fundamental rights in society, such as religious belief, property, honor and the individual's physical and mental safety. This is why the assault on any of those rights, be it even against one individual, is taken as an offense against society as a whole and a threat to its stability and security. In this respect, the Qur'an states that : "*Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind.*" (Mai'ida, 32).

Moreover, since Islam provides the individuals with all the rights they need, committing a crime becomes in itself an act of barbarity.

Also, even if the sentences at times may seem to be extremely severe, they are very rarely carried out since a number of specific requirements must first be met and complex procedures followed. It may even be said that those sentences are primarily meant to deter people from committing crimes which provoke the anger of Allah who remains the One who is most merciful to His creatures.

Finally, it should be noted that because of the way in which they have been set, these punishments have had, throughout history, the great effect in the formation and development of a collective conscience among the Muslim community and almost in all the other societies. It is this conscience which makes Muslims abstain from committing crimes, not because of any fear of the punishment set by the penal code, but primarily out of religious principles and beliefs.

The Allegation that Islamic Fasting Jeopardizes the Efficiency of Both Individual and Society

In Islam, fasting is the second worship after prayer. Fasting requires that the Muslim abstains from food, drink and sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset and it is observed during the month of Ramadan.

The wisdom of fasting is that it helps the Muslim strengthen his will and forge self-discipline. When fasting, the Muslim abstains from what is permitted and available to him out of reverence and respect for Allah, and by so doing he develops the will to abstain from what Allah has forbidden.

Also because it is a worshipping practice that only Allah can know about, fasting becomes an exercise in strengthening the Muslim's conscience and not a means for one to boast of in public.

On the basis of what has been said above, it becomes clear that fasting is a religious observance which trains the individual to be strong, in control of his whims and desires, and wholly invested in whatever work he does. Indeed, it is a historical fact that Muslims in the past were able to carry out great achievements in Ramadan without fasting jeopardizing either their creativity or productivity.

As for the causes of the decrease in productivity in some Muslim countries during the month of Ramadan, those should be looked for in the ramifications of the Western life-style which has become dominant in those societies. One may for example consider the great influence of the mass media, especially television whose programs are broadcast throughout the night. A Muslim who stays up very late watching television and then fasts the next day is likely to be less productive in his work because of lack of sleep. Fasting involves also a health advantage : being patient with stomach emptiness all through the day (in Ramadan) ensures rest for the body; the latter's productivity becomes more efficient at the end of fasting. This is better than if the body keeps functioning relentlessly under the pressure of fat and surfeit. It is doubtless that good health has a

good impact on work and production all throughout the year, which is better than the illnesses that are due to one's being uninterruptedly engrossed in eating and drinking.

The Allegation that Islam Is Not Compatible with Modern Civilization, a Fact which Explains the Muslims' Backwardness

The backwardness that Muslims have been suffering from over the last few centuries cannot be blamed on Islam. On the contrary, this backwardness is primarily due to the ignorance or misinterpretation of the dictates and principles of Islam. Besides, the reasons which account for the regression of Muslims are not impossible for a reasonable mind to determine and name.

In addition to the advantages it offers, modern civilization also betrays a number of limitations and disadvantages which Islam openly rejects. The deterioration of moral values, family break up, unemployment, pollution, arms race and all kinds of abuse are some of the shortcomings of modern civilization which Islam disavows.

As for its advantages, it must be noted that Islam has, for ages, been strongly advocating education and science, the efficient management of time and energy, and the total investment and devotion to the work that one does. More than that, Islam also trains the individual to be a good believer and a productive member in society.

The reasons of either development or backwardness must be sought neither in Christianity nor in Islam. The Japanese, for example, are today one of the most developed people though they do not embrace any of the heavenly religions, and so are the Chinese who have no religion altogether. Thus, one can see that it is special circumstances and specific conditions which either facilitate development or cause backwardness.

On the Question of Why Muslims Are Victims of Dispute and Dissension whereas Islam Calls for Unity

It is true that Islam calls for unity and solidarity, as is clearly stated in the following Qur'anic verse : "*Cling one and all to the faith of God and let nothing divide you.*" (Al 'Imran, 103). It is also a fact that Muslims have been able to live by the principle of unity under different circumstances. The dissension and disunity they suffer from today can only be explained by other factors such as personal conflicts for power, Western colonization, the ignorance and underdevelopment of the Muslim peoples and their self-isolation.

It should be noted that the threads of unity are being sewn again as a result of the increase in the rate of the educated among the Muslim populations, their frequent contact with other peoples and civilizations and the intolerance Muslims find themselves victims of. All those reasons have led the Muslim communities to strengthen their relationships through organizations such as The Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Moreover, while dispute characterizes the relationships between states and governments, it is hardly felt among the Muslim peoples who share the same emotions and aspirations. Any harm or injustice which befalls a Muslim generates spontaneous feelings of sympathy and solidarity from Muslims all over the world. It is this feeling of solidarity which the Prophet (MAPBUH) underlines in this saying : "*The believers who share their sympathy, mercy and love, resemble an organic body which, when just one of its members is in pain, the entire body suffers from fever and wakefulness*" (reported by Muslim and Ibn Hanbal). In any case, we can say that if Muslims live in a state of dispute and dissent, it is because they did not remain faithful to Islamic Principles. Islamic revival can come only through work according to Islamic principles.

The Allegation that the Islamic Jihad (Holy War) Incites Muslims to Inflict Harm Upon Others

It is very sad that the Islamic Jihad has been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted by non-Muslims. Islam does not call for wars except when the rights and freedom of Muslims are threatened. The Qur'an states that : "*Permission is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. God has power to grant them victory*" (Hajj, 39). The Qur'an has also made it clear that Muslims must not use their power to aggress other people : "*Fight for the sake of God those who fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors*" (Baqara, 190).

More than that, even when the case involves a warding off of an aggression, Islam calls for tolerance and a punishment that does not cause more harm than suffered. This is made clear in this Qur'anic verse : "*If you punish, let your punishment be commensurate with the wrong that has been done you. But it shall be best for you to endure your wrongs with patience*" (Nahl, 126)

The enemies of Islam have built upon transgressions made by some Muslim rulers in different historical eras to articulate Islam's stand on war. The generalizations they have made constitute an injustice against the religion. Both the Qur'anic texts and the Prophet's sayings call for a peaceful Co-existence with non-Muslims and urge the Muslim community to treat the latter fairly and to observe good manners when they dialogue with them. Unfortunately, the main reason behind the misinterpretation of the Islamic Jihad remains the non-differentiation between the stand and principles of Islam as a religion and the behavior of some Muslims. The wisdom behind Jihad is to decimate the strength of any ruler who deprives his people from the right to know the ultimate message which came to rectify whatever went astray in people's minds. There was, therefore, no armed friction between Muslims and Ethiopia because the rulers of the latter did not prevent missionaries from circulating freely and

getting the message to people. In the modern world, which is known for cross cultural contacts, Jihad should take the form of cultural dialogues (and persuasion) in the light of peaceful cohabitation.

The Allegation that Islam Is Incompatible with Democracy and Human Rights and that the Ruler Is Under No Obligation to Seek Counsel From Other Muslims -Along With the Unsustained Accusation of the Muslims' Stand vis-a-vis the Other Opinion

The claim that Islam is incompatible with the democratic system of governance is completely unfounded. Before any of the political systems known today, Islam has called for the participation of all individuals in the political life of their societies and has made sure their contribution is not weakened by restrictions. Allah has ordered His Prophet (MAPBUH) to take counsel with his companions on matters of concern to the Muslim community : "*Take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs*" (Al 'Imran, 139). Allah has also set the norms of the exemplary Muslim society : "*And conduct their affairs by mutual consent*" (Shura, 38).

It has been testified that the Prophet (MAPBUH) was the one who most took counsel with his companions, and so did the Righteous Caliphs who came after him. It has also been reported that the individuals who did not approve of the ruler's policies could voice their dissent without fearing for their life, as did a woman who opposed a decision made by the second Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab who used to say : "*May Allah bless those who point to my defects.*"

Muslim theologians have concluded that counsel is more binding to the ruler than the most likely opinion which the majority of theologians adhere to.

According to Muslim Scholars, there is also a set of regulatory principles which the Muslim must observe when responding to the opinion of the other. In fact, Islamic education trains the Muslim to be a good listener and to respond to his interlocutor's statements by using sound proofs and convincing arguments. The Muslim is also required to observe the ethics of scientific debate and to remain open-minded and amiable no matter how prejudiced his interlocutor's opinions may be. As

a matter of fact, the Muslim's broad-mindedness has inspired some extraordinary sayings which have become part of the body of popular culture in Muslim societies, such as : "*Difference in opinions should not jeopardize friendship and amiability*", or again : "*It may be that I hold the wrong opinion and it is likely that the other's can prove to be true.*"

The Muslim's broad-mindedness is also reflected in Islamic Theology, as well as in various other sciences, which have branched off into different schools of thought and denominations, with followers disseminating their views and opinions.

It is also true that Islam is the religion which is most protective of human rights, as has been confirmed by all the Islamic texts and Islamic life-styles.

The history of Human Rights issue, which now seems to be a commonplace topic, is quite recent. The idea was first born in England (1688), the U.S. (1767) and France (1789) and was adopted by the international community only in 1948 in The International Declaration of Human Rights, The European Agreement on Human Rights (1950) and The International Agreement on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). In addition to a set of rights meant to protect the life of the human being and preserve their dignity, the idea of human rights is founded on two fundamental principles: freedom and equality.

A quick look at the Qur'an, the Prophetic Tradition and the manners of those who have been brought up under their guidance shows that Islam was the first to attest the importance of human rights. Suffice it here to mention a few of those rights which Islam seeks to safeguard :

- Allah's declaration that a human being is an honored and noble creature : "*We have bestowed blessings on Adam's children*" (Isra', 70).
- The affirmation of the right of equality for all human beings regardless of their gender, race or social status : "*Men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul. From that soul He created its mate, and through them He bestowed the earth with countless men and women.*" (Nisa', 1).

- The affirmation that each individual has a right to life and safety :
“Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as though he had saved all mankind” (Ma'ida, 32). One could also note the following sayings by the Prophet (MAPBUH) : *“It may be easier for Allah to bear the vanishing of earth than the killing of a Muslim”* (reported by Muslim and in Tarmidhi's *Sanan*). Or again, his saying that : *“Allah will prohibit Paradise to whoever kills a free non-Muslim”* (in Tarmidhi's *Sanan* and Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad*).
- The affirmation of the right of freedom and liberation from slavery. With respect to this issue, it has been reported that the Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab (MABH) once told Amr Ibn al-Aas and his son : *“How come you enslave people when in fact they were born free ?”* Then he informed the public that : *“I did not appoint governors to inflict harm upon you or take away your property, so whoever among you suffers any harm must report to me so that I could personally avenge him.”*
- The affirmation of the freedom of religion. Allah says that : *“There shall be no compulsion in religion”* (Baqara 256) and in another verse: *“Say : ‘This is the truth from your Lord. Let him who will, believe in it, and him who will, deny it’”*, (Kahf, 29) and also : *“You have your own religion, and I have mine”* (Kafirun, 6).

It is unfair on the part of those who use The Declaration of Human Rights, which is a document put together by human beings in the second half of the twentieth century, to make judgments upon Islam, which is a divine religion sent by Allah to guide the human being to the right path at all times and in all places.

Moreover, the wisdom is in the extent to which human rights are universal and comprehensive and how effective they are in people's daily life. One would note with sadness that developed countries seem to worry more about their citizens than about other peoples who, it appears, do not

deserve to enjoy the rights guaranteed by The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also ironic that rich and developed countries blame small and poor countries for the non-application of the Human Rights Declaration while they themselves transgress the dictates of this Declaration.

Finally, it must be noted that the idea of human rights in Islam is energized by a profound religious motif, a fact which makes one observe them not only out of fear of punishment instituted by civil code but mostly out of reverence for the Majesty of Allah.

The Allegation that Islam Is Hostile to Art (Music, Song, Dance, Sculpture, Photography and Theater)

Islam is not hostile to Art in itself, and certainly not to the sublime Art which elevates the Spirit and refines human feelings and emotions. On the contrary, Islam calls for the Art which encourages virtue and condemns vice.

Indeed, the Prophet (MAPBUH) encouraged the poets who defended high moral values and noble principles. It is a well-known truth that Muslims excelled in the art of poetry which they developed to an extraordinary level of excellence both in form and content.

It is also known that the Prophet (MAPBUH) appreciated the enchanting effect that a lovely voice can have upon the listener. This may partly explain his choice of Bilal, one of the Prophet's companions who was known for his refined and tender voice, to be the first Muslim to call for prayer.

Those who have misinterpreted the stand of Islam on Art have justified their judgement by referring to Islam's prohibition of painting and sculpture. In fact, this prohibition was instituted to avoid confusion between the Muslims and the unbelievers who used to worship idols which they took for their gods.

Muslims in all societies have understood the wisdom behind this prohibition and have complied with it without rejecting Art altogether. In fact, they reached high excellence in painting, architecture, the arabesque, the art of miniature, and other artistic creations which are admired all over the world still find fascinating.

In sum, Islam rejects only base art which awakens instincts, celebrates vice and encourages crime.

The Allegation that Islam Calls for Intolerance and Extremism and That the Term “Muslim” Has Become Synonymous with “Terrorist”

The claim that Islam calls for intolerance and extremism is completely untrue. The Qur'anic texts explicitly prohibit religious extremism and intolerance : “*Do not transgress the bounds of your religion*” (Nisaa', 171) and the Muslims are described as “a just nation” : “*We have made you a just nation*” (Baqara, 143). Allah also warns His Prophet (MAPBUH) and the believers against transgression : “*Follow then the right path as you are bidden, together with those who have repented with you, and do not transgress*” (Hud, 112).

Whoever meditates on the wisdom and teachings of Islam will realize that they are founded on the principles of ease and forgiveness. Allah says : “*God desires your well-being, not your discomfort*” (Baqara, 185). This can also be seen in Islamic religious rites such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage which cultivate noble manners and high moral standards (reverence for the bonds of kinship, forgiveness, justice, forbearance and the assistance of one another to stay on the right path). Allah says : “*Prayer fends away indecency and evil.*” (Ankabut, 45)

It is reported on the Prophet (MAPBUH) his saying that : “*Fasting is a shield that protects the Muslim from obscenity and foolishness. If insulted or dared into a duel, the fasting person must reply by repeating twice : ‘I am fasting’*” (reported by Bukhari). The Prophet (MAPBUH) has also stated that Allah considers as alms any act through which the individual seeks to remove a harmful obstacle from the road, ask Allah's blessing for someone who sneezes (by saying : “*May Allah bless you!*”), exchange greetings and return a better salutation than the one received. It should be noted here that the prevalent salutation among Muslims is : “*Peace be upon you.*”

It is true that even when the Prophet (MAPBUH) was still alive, some Muslims misunderstood the teachings of Islam. They assumed that

the Muslim had to devote all his time to worship, lead a life of asceticism and give up the blessings of this mundane world. Because of that, the Prophet (MAPBUH) had to show them their errors and to explain to them that the best Muslim was the one who managed to reconcile between worship and his mundane duties. The Prophet's (MAPBUH) message is made explicit in the following Hadith which has been reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim :

“A group of people went to see the wives of the Prophet (MAPBUH) to inquire about the Prophet's (MAPBUH) ways of worship. When his wives informed them, they seemed to think that they could devote more time to worship than the Prophet (MAPBUH) did. Then they said : ‘How far are we still from the Prophet (MAPBUH) ?! Allah has forgiven him all his sins.’ Then one of them said: ‘I will spend all the night in prayer;’ then another one said : ‘I will fast during the whole year and I will not break the fast;’ then a third one said : ‘I will keep away from women and never marry.’ Then came the Prophet (MAPBUH) and told them : ‘You who said so and so, by Allah, I fear Allah and worship Him more than you do but I fast and I break fasting, I pray and sleep, and I get married; so whoever does not follow my way is not one from among us.” In fact, this is what the Qur'an stipulates in the following verse : *“But seek, by means of that which God has given you, to attain the abode of the hereafter. Do not forget your share in this world”* (Qisas, 77).

In reality, Islam came to establish balance and equilibrium after the religious extremism which the Jews instituted when they went against nature by prohibiting what Allah permitted and indulged in mundane affairs and in deceit and falsehood to accumulate fortune. Islam also came to correct the extremism the Christians instituted when they transgressed the divine will and imposed on their monks a life of abstinence, self-isolation and total devotion to worship. Allah states that : *“Say : ‘Who has forbidden you to wear the decent clothes or to eat the good things which God has provided for his servants’* (Al'A'araf, 32)

Thus, it becomes clear that extremism and intolerance are not stipulated by religion but, on the contrary, they result from an erroneous

or incomplete conceptualization of Islam. The Prophet (MAPBUH) has noted that the extremist may become irreligious as a result of the incorrect interpretations and readings he makes of his religion.

Abi Sa'id al-Khodri reported that : *“While the Prophet (MAPBUH) was distributing shares, Abdu'llah Ibn Di al-Khuwayssira at-Tamimi came and said : ‘Be fair, O Prophet!’ Then the Prophet (MAPBUH) replied : ‘Woe unto you! Who can be more just and fair than me ?’ Upon this, the Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab said : ‘O Prophet! Let me cut off his neck!’ Then the Prophet (MAPBUH) said : ‘Let him be! There are people like him who get off the right path the way an arrow deviates from its course.’*² This means that they became excessively adamant in the observance of their religious rites but they do not assimilate their significance and essence; more than that, they do not even realize that good manners constitute the essence of every religious rite.

As for the allegation of terrorism which has become attached to the Muslims, it is drawn on the basis of the actions of very few individuals or groups which hide behind the mask of religion, and Islam disavows this type of people, to win the sympathy of the poor so that they could achieve their personal interests. As a matter of fact, it was never reported that the Prophet's (MAPBUH) companions or the orthodox Caliphs ever killed a peaceful non-Muslim or tried to have him convert into Islam under the point of the sword. Neither was it ever known that any of them killed a Muslim because he held a different opinion or followed a different denomination. Suffice it here to remember what the Qur'an says about this : *“Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as though he had saved all mankind”* (5:32). The Prophet (MAPBUH) has said : *“Everything that belongs to a Muslim is forbidden for any other Muslim : his blood, his money and his honor”* (reported in Tarmidhi's *Sanan* and Ibn Maja's *Sanan*). He has also said : *“Allah will not ease on the Day of Judgement the soul of whoever has frightened a*

2. Al-Bukhari has reported that there is a consensus on the truth of this saying.

believer" (reported in Tarmidhi's *Sanan* and Ibn Maja's *Sanan*). Or again :
"The Muslim is the one who the Muslims are safe from his tongue and his hand (that is who does not harm them)" (reported by Bukhari and Muslim). Allah has also said : "Pray to your Lord with humility and in secret. He does not love the transgressors. Do not Corrupt the earth after it has been purged of evil" (Al A'raf, 55-56)

Islam also calls for a peaceful coexistence between peoples and nations : "Men, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you in God's sight is he who is most righteous" (Hujurat, 12). Islam also urges Muslims to treat the non-Muslims with kindness and equity : "God does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who have neither made war on your religion nor driven you from your homes" (Mumtahina, 8)

The fact of the matter is that terrorism has become an international phenomenon that all societies and religions suffer from. It is the enemies of Islam who strive to make it look as if Muslim societies were the only ones which produce terrorists. Indeed, Western media have intensified the war against Islam after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the propagation of the claim that Islam was the next enemy after communism. Such allegations against Islam are completely unfounded. There is more than a billion of peaceful Muslims who live all over the world and who are intent on ensuring safety and social stability because they know that the fundamental principles of their religion are based on reconciliation and tolerance.

Epilogue

This book has dealt with the most important claims and allegations which have been made against Islam in the past and in the present. These allegations represent the relentless and constant attempts made by the enemies of Islam to destroy the cohesive structure of this religion which Allah has willed as the seal of divine religions sent to the inhabitants of this earth.

The Holy Qur'an itself has noted the stand of its enemies who have tried to find vagueness, obscurity and contradictions in it, as is the case with books written by human beings. The Qur'an notes that the reason it is free from contradictions is simply because it has come from Allah : *“If it had not come from God, they could have surely found in it many contradictions”* (Nisaa', 82).

What is important for us here is that the Muslim must serve as an exemplary model of the ethics of Islam. He must spread Islam using wisdom and good manners. In fact, the best method to achieve serene persuasion lies in the use of rational proof and the exact text. This is the method we have tried to use in this book either in the brief and simplified conceptualization of Islam we have tried to depict to you or in our objective reply to the most important and common allegations that are made against Islam and Muslims.

We would also like to ask our non-Muslim readers to leave aside, be it only for a while, the claims and allegations made against Islam which may have prejudiced their opinion of Islam and to make of the quest for Truth their sole objective. The issue here is not one about a political or economic ideology which, if propagated, would benefit Muslims. What we are dealing with here is a divine religion which has been sent by Allah to free all human beings from the darkness of misgivings and suspicions and to lead them to the path of Eternal Happiness.

May Allah make us of those who listen to the word and follow the best of it.

May Peace be bestowed upon those who have embraced the true religion.