



MUHAMMAD ASAD

(Leopold Weiss)

EUROPE'S
GIFT
TO

ISLAM



Edited, annotated and written by

M. IKRAM CHAGHATAI

THE TRUTH SOCIETY

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The book is dedicated to

Pola Hamida Asad (Asad's wife),

Dr. Talal Asad (1930--, Asad's son)

and

Murad Wilfried Hofmann (1931--)

Maryam Jameelah (1934--)

who embraced Islam after reading Muhammad Asad's books

and

many *Asadians* of Islamic World,

Europe and North America

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INTRODUCTION

If I am allowed to make a minor alteration in Abraham Geiger's (1810-1874) pioneering *Preisschrift* (prize essay) under the title *Was hat Muhammad auf dem Judentum aufgenommen?*¹ and replace 'Muhammad' with 'Islam', I would like to put the name of Leopold Weiss *alias* Muhammad Asad (12.7.1900, Lemberg—20.2.1992, Mijas) on the top of the list of those selective borrowings which Islam has taken from Jewish sources.

Several European and American writers, journalists, savants and élites were profoundly moved by Islam and their yearning soul found solace in the eternal, peace-loving and humanitarian concepts of this religion.² The reasons and incentives of their conversion³ are, no doubt,

¹ "What did Muhammad adopt from Judaism?" Bonn: Philologische Fakultät, 1833, reprinted: Leipzig 1912; see also Bernard Lewis: *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton, 1984; *ibid.*: "The Pro-Islamic Jews", in: *Islam in History. Ideas, People and Events in the Middle East*. Chicago: Open Court, 1993; and Abraham I. Katz: *Judaism in Islam*. New York 1980.

In 2000, Mohamed Ghounem founded an organization in America named *The Jews for Allah* whose main objective is to collect the material that contains an array of uniting similarities between Islam and Judaism.

² A few such converted Muslims are mentioned below:

Marmaduke Pickthall (d. 1936), Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirāj al-Din, 24.1.1909-12.5.2005), René Guénon ('Abd al-Wāhid Yāhyā, 1886-1951), Hasan Gai Eaton (b. 1922), Muhammad Aman Herbert Hobohm (b. 1926), Murad Wilfried Hofmann (b. 1931), Baron Umar Rolf von Ehrenfels (1901-1980), Frithjof Schuon (Isa Nur al-Din, 1907-1998), Titus Ibrahim Burckhard (1908-1984), Julius Germanus (Abdul Karim Germanus, 1884-1979), Thomas Irving (al-Hāj Ta'lim 'Ali), Hamid Algar, Margaret Marcus (Maryam Jameelah), Cyril Glasse, Jeffery Lang, Michael Wolfe etc. etc.

³ Marcia Hermansen writes: "Conversion is not really an adequate term for the experience. There seems to be a lack of a radical moment of 'snapping' or a total rejection of the previous identity. All accounts reflect a sense of returning to what one has always been and it is for this reason that the term 'revision' is often preferred by the individuals themselves."

(*The Muslim World*, January 1999, p. 79).

On this topic see also *Conversion to Islam*. Ed. by N. Levtzion, New York 1979

varied but their spiritual journey ended after entering the fold of Islam. Among the *crème de la crème* of these Western intellectuals, belonging to the different persuasions and disciplines, Muhammad Asad has an edge over them and his unparalleled distinction of being a leading Muslim in the array of distinguished converts of the West rests on different factors, e.g.

- i) Many converted Muslims have narrated their journey to Islam, intermingled with the circumstantial fluctuations that happened in the transference of allegiance from one cultural environment to another. Among such moving spiritual autobiographies Asad's *The Road to Mecca* is an extraordinary book and it reveals that on this well-trodden path of self-confessions he explored new ways for others to follow his footprints comfortably. The whole story is so gripping and interesting that the readers consider themselves as his companions. Usually it is said that Asad's adventure, so magnificently described, is an admixture of fact and fiction and it seems rather difficult to differentiate between them. Its frequent editions, reprints (both authorized and unauthorized) and translations in almost all the major languages of the world is an ample proof of its ever-lasting significance for the truth-seekers of every religion.⁴
- ii) Asad's *magnum opus* is his *The Message of the Qur'an*--a highly readable English translation of the present time. In a huge body of such translations, made by learned Muslims, converted Muslims and non-Muslims or eminent orientologists, it is considered a notable addition. His mastery of Arabic language is not bookish and he gained it after spending many years in the remote parts of the Arab world, particularly in Saudi Arabia (1927-1932), where he made an access to

and Lisbeth Rocher/Fatima Cherqaoui: *D'une foi l'autre. Les conversions à l'islam en Occident*. Paris 1986; Monika Wohlrab-Sahr: "Das Unbehagen im Körper und das Unbehagen in der Kulture. Überlegungen zum Fall einer Konversion zum Islam", In: Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (ed.): *Biographie und Religion. Zwischen Ritual und Selbstsuche*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus 1995, pp. 285-311; Talal Asad: "Comments on Conversion." In: Peter van der Veer (ed.): *Conversion to Modernities. The Globalization of Christianity*. New York/London: Routledge 1996, pp. 263-273.

⁴ cf. Wolf Kaiser: *Palästina-Erez Israel; Deutschsprachige Reisebeschreibungen jüdischer Autoren von der Jahrhundertwende bis zum, zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1992, pp. 283 ff.

primitive groups or tribes whose spoken Arabic was helpful in understanding the Quranic meaning and diction. Then he devoted seventeen years of his life in translating the Qur'an, but not in his own mother-tongue (e.g. German) but in chaste and idiomatic English. In addition, it also contains useful exhaustive notes and appendices on various Quranic themes. Though some of his ideas and interpretations are repugnant to the common viewpoint of Muslims, but his deviational concepts have not diminished the significance of his work.⁵

- iii) The rich and fascinating life of Muhammad Asad is scattered over three continents but the time he spent in India (1932-1947) proved to be a turning-point in his life, ideologically as well as intellectually. After meeting Iqbal, he not only discontinued his programme of further traveling but also set a goal of his life and that was to struggle incessantly for establishing an ideal Islamic state—an agreed-upon concept, though some Muslim theorists view the matter differently. Most of his writings, particularly in his own journal *Arafat* (Dalhousie, 1946-47) show his strong conviction for having a separate homeland for Muslims. In recognition of his sincere efforts for such state, he was rightly called “the intellectual co-founder of Pakistan.”

Immediately after the creation of Pakistan, he presented a blue-print for a constitution of this newly-established state. He also headed an official institute and in this capacity he mostly took advantage of Iqbal's ideas for reconstructing

⁵ A specimen of this translation was based on the first nine *Surahs* (from *al-Baqarah* to *al-Tawbah*) of the Qur'an. It was published under the title *The Message of the Qur'an* from Mecca (Muslim World League 1964, pp. 255). Apart from its serious departures from the orthodox viewpoint of 'ulema' of the entire Muslim world, he continued his work and published the complete translation from his own resources in 1980. Its frequent reprints (1993, 1997, 2003 etc.) and translations in other European languages prove its universal acceptance and exegetic importance.

M. Ruthven evaluates *The Message of the Qur'an* in these words:

“No translation can do justice to the original, no commentary can ever be definitive. But Muhammad Asad [...] has come as near as anyone to making the divine text intelligible to modern readers of the English language. That is an achievement for which future generations of Muslims and non-Muslims must always be grateful.”

(in: *Arabia*, September 1981, p. 62)

Islamic thought according to the requirements of the modern age. Afterwards, as a high-ranking employee of Pakistan's foreign office, his contribution to establish firm cordial relationship with the entire Muslim world, especially with Saudi Arabia, is unforgettable. Unfortunately, he had to resign from the foreign ministry for certain reasons and, thus, his old dream of an ideal Islamic state was shattered.

- iv) Most of the Western converted Muslims (like Ivan Aguéli and Roger Garaudy) have continued to live among people who knew them from the time before their conversion. They still have a need to explain themselves, whereas Muhammad Asad alone broke radically with his past spending half a lifetime outside of Europe among the people of his adopted faith.
- v) After becoming an essential part of a new network of significant others, Muhammad Asad freed himself from all sorts of old ties and devoted his whole life for the cause of his new faith and its followers. Among converted Muslims of the West, "none has contributed more than Asad to elucidating Islam as an ideology and converging its quintessential spirit in contemporary terms to Muslims and non-Muslims alike."⁶

Some of the titles cited below explicitly indicate a distinctive place he has in the modern Islamic world:

Muslim mentor—Ambassador of Islam—Doyen of Islamic scholars—Visionary Islamic scholar—Major interpreter and spokesman of Islam—Visionär der Goldenen Mitte—"Ketzler"—Islamische Löwe—Europas Geschenk an den Islam—Grenzgänger zwischen der Kulturen, etc.

- vi) A cursory glance of Asad's life reveals that he had a restless soul and temperamentally, it was not possible for him to reside at one place permanently. By nature, he was a Bedouin—a person who always wanders. He dressed as a Bedouin, spoke Bedouin Arabic and had a Bedouin life. This natural instinct was the main cause of the arabization of his inner and outer life. As an European Bedouin he deeply loved deserts, the people living there and their life-style. He had a strong love for the Arabs and felt more at home in Saudi Arabia than in Western society. The constantly moving nature of his soul and the desert-like vastness of his scholarship are

⁶ See Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm Nawwāb's article, included in the present book.

reflected in his studies.

- vii) Muhammad Asad pioneered in translating any collection of *ahādith* (Prophet's sayings) into English. He intended to complete his translation of *Sahih al-Bukhari* in eight volumes, consisting of forty instalments but only five parts of the fifth volume appeared between 1935 and 1938 and the script of the remaining instalments was destroyed in the flood of river Rāvi. Afterwards, he could not restart his incomplete project and put all his energies in translating the Qur'ān.
- viii) It scarcely happens that a person's name portrays almost all the phases of his life but the name of Asad is an exceptional one. The following different forms of his name indicate the various stages of his life.

Leopold Weiss (family name)—Poldi (name of endearment)—Asadullah⁷ (at the time of conversion, 1926), Mohammaed Essad Weiss (1927)—Hadji Mohammed Weiss (1928)—Haji Asadullah (1928)—Mohammed Assad Leopold Weiss (1928)—Muhammad Asadullah (1929), Leopold Muhammad Weiss (1930), Muhammad Leopold Weiss (1930), M. Asadullah (1931),—Asadullah von Weiss (1931)—Herr Leopold Weiss *alias* Mohammad Asad Ullah Vyce (1933, 1934)—Allamah Asad, Mawlana Asad, Haji Asad, Haji Muhammad Asad, Sheikh Muhammad Asad (1934-1938) and Muhammad Asad (1940--).

Islam in Germany and Asad's Conversion

Like other European countries, millions of Muslims are living in Germany. After reunification (3 October 1990), Germany has a population of roughly 82 million of which 3.111.000 are Muslims, representing almost all of the important aspects of the variety of the

⁷ In an interview, Asad explains: "Do you know that Lemberg comes from 'Löwe' (lion) and when I converted to Islam in Berlin in 1926, the Indian Imam said to me 'you are called Leopold, and leo mean lion—therefore we take the Arabic name for lion, Asad.'"

Throughout his life, he remained conscious about the meaning of his name. After the Second World War, he joined the Ahl-i Hadith Seminary at Sheranwala Gate in Lahore. He was struck by the fact that the locality was named after 'lions' that decorated the gate under which the seminary was located."

(see Khaled Ahmad's article, included in the present work)

Muslim *ummah*.⁸ However, the preponderance of Muslims of Turkish origin gives Islam in Germany a Turkish-Ottoman rather than an Arab or Indian colouring. Some reputed Islamicists and Arabists of the German-speaking countries have credited the propagation of Islam in their region to Turkish people and absolutely ignored the role played by other nations in this respect, particularly the Indian contribution which is directly linked with Asad's conversion.⁹

Apart from the historical, political and cultural center of Germany, Berlin is an important city in order to trace the history of preaching of Islam in the German-speaking regions. Probably in the beginning of the twentieth century, a German orientalist named Hermann (?), Professor of Arabic in the Oriental Seminary of Berlin University (Berliner Seminar?), established an organization under the title Deutsch Gesellschaft des Islamkunde (Arabic name "Jami'at al-Almāniyya lil-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya") that aimed at carrying out the projects relating to Islamic studies.¹⁰ During the First World War, this learned body was very active, but as soon as War ended, it became inert. At that time, another renowned German orientalist Georg Kampffmeyer (1864-1936) took charge and tried to reactivate it.¹¹ Luckily, he made an acquaintance with Abdul Jabbār al-Khairi (1880-1958), an Indian newcomer in Berlin, who infused a new soul in the dying body of this society. As a firm, energetic and enthusiastic Muslim, he delivered twelve weekly lectures on the various Islamic subjects, followed by long

⁸ Cf. Zentralinstitut Islam-Archiv. Deutschland. Dokumentation No. 2003 (May 2003)

⁹ See Prof. Smail Balić (26.8.1920-14.3.2002, *Die Muslims im Donauraum. Österreich und der Islam*); Gerhard Höpp (1942-2003, *Araber in Berlin*, 2nd ed., Berlin 2002, pp. 7-46) and Prof. Dr. Reinhard Schulze (Bern University, *Islamischer Internationalismus in 20. Jahrhundert...* Leiden: Brill, 1990) have provided useful information about the early period of propagation of Islam in Austria, Germany and Switzerland respectively. Besides, the following books are worth to know more on this subject:

Muhammad S. Abdullah: *Geschichte des Islams in Deutschland*. Graz etc.: Styria 1981; Anna Stroble: *Der Islam in Österreich*. Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 1997; Tilmann Hannemann, Peter Meier-Hüsing (eds.): *Deutsche Islam—Islam in Deutschland*, Marburg 2000; Faruk Sen: *Islam in Deutschland*, München 2002; Robert Hunt: "Islam in Austria" (in: *MW*, 92/1-2 (Spring 2002), pp. 115-128)

¹⁰ Cf. *Zamindār* (Lahore), 28 March 1923.

¹¹ Ibid., 10 August 1923. G. Kampffmeyer substantially contributed to Arabic dialectology and the Neu-Arabic literature; see for detail E. Pritsch's obituary notice in: *Welt des Islams*, 18 (1936), pp. 1-11, with bibliography. In his letter to Iqbal (still unpublished), he acknowledges the receipt of *Reconstruction*.

question-answer sessions. In the same year (October), an international conference of philosophers was held in Jena and its founder/president Prof. Ottogon (?) invited al-Khairi for explaining the basic tenets of Islam to the participants of this conference. Weekly gatherings (on every Tuesday) under the aegis of *Gesellschaft* were held where al-Khairi gave sermons to non-Muslim Germans on the different aspects of Islam.¹²

Abdul Jabbār al-Khairi arrived in Berlin in 1918 (September) and he started individually his own mission of propagating Islam in 1919. Three years later, he founded *Jami'at al-Islamiyya Berlin* (in German *Islamische Gemende zu Berlin e.V.*) on 29 May 1922 ('Eid al-Fiṭr).¹³ He was the first elected 'Imām' of this Society and the 'delegates' were Muslims of forty-two nations but permanently settled in Berlin and other adjacent areas and the Germans, both male and female, who embraced Islam. In its Imām's residence (Hannoverische St. 1, Berlin N.W.6), every Sunday (afternoon) a small number of Muslims (seven or eight) used to come and listen attentively al-Khairi's fervent speeches. No non-Muslim was allowed to attend these weekly meetings. In his tireless efforts for preaching Islam, his younger brother, Abdus Sattār al-Khairi (d. 1945) was co-operating with him.¹⁴ Soon their combined struggle became fruitful and many educated Germans accepted Islam.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., see also *Aligarh Gazette*, 11 September 1922.

¹³ With reference to G. Höpp (op. cit.), Günter Windhager gives the date of 11 November 1922 (see *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad*, Vienna 2000, p. 178 and note 618).

¹⁴ Cf. 'Abdus Sattār al-Khairi's articles, sent from Germany and published in *Muhammadan*, a weekly English journal, Madras (1921-1922).

¹⁵ Both these Khairi brothers—'Abdul Jabbār and 'Abdus Sattār—belonged to an esteemed Ḥanafī family of distinguished litterateurs and religious scholars like Mawlāwī 'Abd-ur Rabb Dihlawī, Deputy Nazir Ahmad (LL.D.), Mawlāwī Nazir Husain Muhaddith Dihlawī, Allama Rāshidul Khairi, etc. Their father was Khan Bahadur Mawlāwī 'Abdul Ḥāmid Dihlawī and the grandsons of the elder brother of Mawlāwī Abd-ur Rashid Wā'iz Dihlawī. In 1904, both left India for Egypt where they completed their religious education with distinction. From Syrian Protestant College, 'Abdul Jabbār (elder brother) and 'Abdus Sattār (younger one) obtained M. A. degrees in science and history respectively. Afterwards, they established an educational institution named "Dār ul-'ulūm" at the level of a college. They got the University Charter from Bāb-i 'Aali but the commencement of the First World War interrupted their educational plans. During the War, both took active part with Turkey and Syria and through journals *Akhuwwat* (Urdu weekly) and *Brotherhood* (English monthly), both from Istanbul—they fired the warring Muslims against their opponents, therefore they had to wind up everything in Beirut and set out for

Five months after founding the *Jami'at*, 'Abdul Jabbār al-Khairi started a journal in German named *Islam*¹⁶ (or *Islamia*) from the Akademisch-Islamischen Vereinigung of his Society.¹⁷ Its first issue appeared in October 1922 and was favourably reviewed in all the leading journals and newspapers of Germany. Al-Khairi used it as a vehicle for propagating Islam and much space was devoted to the activities of his Society. In a short time, this journal became popular among the scholars and savants in Germany and in other European countries as well.

Al-Khairi's sincere, zealous and persistent efforts for the propagation of Islam were rewarded though his co-religionists put many hurdles in his way¹⁸ and one aspect of his success was that several learned personalities of the West embraced Islam. In a letter, written to his younger brother in Delhi, Muhammad 'Abdul Ghaffār al-Khairi (d. 1973), he mentions the names of the following converted Muslims of Germany and other countries:¹⁹

Switzerland. After a sojourn of a few months, they moved to Berlin where both devoted their lives for preaching of Islam.

(This biographical information is based on the different issues of Urdu daily *Zamindar* (Lahore), 1922 and 1923; see also Ahmad Saeed: *Muslim India (1857-1947). A Biographical Dictionary*. Repr. Lahore 2005 (1997), p. 194; Majid Hayat Siddiqi: "Bluff, Doubt and Fear: The Kheiri Brothers and the Colonial State" (in: *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1987), pp. 233-263)

¹⁶ *Zamindar* (Lahore), 23 March 1923.

¹⁷ See Muhammad S. Abdullah, op. cit., p. 27 and G. Höpp: "Muslime unterm Hakenkreuz. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Islamischen Zentralinstituts zu Berlin e.V." (in: *Moslemische Revue*, 17 (72) Jg., Ht. (1994), pp. 16-27)

¹⁸ Since 1919, 'Abdul Jabbār had been in contact with the 'ulamā' of Working Muslim Mission (UK) and sought for their cooperation in his endeavours of preaching Islam in Germany. Upto 1922, he waited for their positive response but failed (see for detail, *Zamindar*, 19 January, 4 February and 24 February 1923). Finally, some influential religious personalities, belonging to Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i Ishā'at Islam (Lahore) personally visited Berlin and founded a mosque there in 1924.

(cf. *Zamindar*, 23 December 1932 and also different issues of *Khilafat* (Bombay) and *Ahl-i Hadith* (Amritsar) of 1924)

¹⁹ *Zamindar* (Lahore), 4 February and 10 August 1923. In Urdu text, these names are given like this:

ہورٹ بانگ (بانگ) الفرد کیمل، کار کروگر شوسب، فیئرلی، کیف مارز آ ستارٹ کے اہلی آرٹ ز اور آ ونہائٹ کیملا

Except no. 6 (Kampffmeyer), the romanised form of these names can be checked by any contemporary source, housed in Islam-Achiv-Deutschland. About Kampffmeyer's conversion, the historians of German Orientalism did

- 1) Hubert Bang or Baning (an American philosopher, Islamic name Khālid and changed his faith on 1st February, 1921)
- 2) Dr. Alfrakehal (German) Barrister
- 3) Dr. Karkruger (German) Mineralogist
- 4) Dr. Shosab (?) Educationist
- 5) Dr. Frenczy (Professor of International Law in Budapest University, Hungary)
- 6) Prof. Georg Kampffmeyer (President of an Association and the editor of a German newspaper)
- 7) Astarindkeally Arnds (German woman) Islamic name Fatima Nurbi
- 8) Awlhert Kapila (German woman) Islamic name Nur Bāndi

A few years later, Leopold Weiss, an Austrian Jew and a foreign correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the Middle East, embraced Islam (September 1926) and entered this group of brilliantly talented converted Muslims.

In his spiritual autobiography, Muhammad Asad has clearly indicated the reasons that prompted him to accept Islam as a true religion but he did not mention the name of the person on whose hands he embraced Islam but only used the words "Indian Imam."²⁰ In an interview (Simon, 1988), he repeated the same words²¹ but, for the first time, he named that person in his video-interview taken by Nasiha al-Sakina and he was none other than the founder of *Islamischen Gemeinde zu*

not say anything.

In the afore-mentioned letter, al-Khairi also informed that many Germans had a soft corner about Islam and were willing to change their faith. But for certain reasons, they had not yet declared it openly.

It is interesting to note here that 'Abdul Jabbār's younger brother 'Abdus Sattār Khairi married a German woman who adopted Islam (Fatima) in 1921 (see his letter to Jinnah, 14 Sept. 1940, published in: ...*Plain Mr. Jinnah*. By Syed Shamsul Hasan, Karachi 1976, p. 267.

²⁰ *Der Weg nach Mekka*. Berlin/Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, pp. 359, 361-362.

²¹ "...when I converted to Islam in Berlin in 1926, the *Indian Imam* said to me..."

"Let us suppose the case of an intelligent non-Muslim of our time who, for some reasons or other, has studied the Arabic language and has become fully proficient therein. One day he has taken up the Qur'ān and is impressed by the beauty of its diction and the spiritual depth of its ideas. He reads on and on and gradually; the immortal truth of this Book unfolds itself before him; and when he is at last convinced that it is *the* truth, he embraces Islam."

(*Arafat*, vol. I, no. 5 (January 1947), p. 129).

Berlin e.V., 'Abdul Jabbār al-Khairi.²² In the beginning of the next year (1927), Asad left Europe with his wife, Else (Aziza), and step-son, Heinrich (Ahmad) Schiemann for the last destination of his spiritual journey (e.g. Mecca) but his name permanently remained in the list of members of al-Khairi's journal entitled *Islamia*, till the Khairi brothers returned to India in February 1931.

Muhammad Asad and Khairi Brothers

Both Khairi brothers—'Abdul Jabbār Khairi and 'Abdus Sattār Khairi—spent about thirteen years (1918-1931) in Germany. During this time they devoted their lives for the propagation of Islam and created a general atmosphere which was very conducive for the talented non-Muslims like Muhammad Asad to study Islam without their previous reservations and religious persuasions. In spite of their limited financial resources, they continued their mission and rendered meritorious services in presenting a true picture of Islam to German intelligentsia. Now it seems rather impossible to overlook the historic contribution they made for the propagation of Islam in Germany and adjoining countries.

The relationship between Asad and Khairi Brothers was cordial, particularly when they were staying in Berlin. Not much is known or has been written so far about their friendly connections. From various scattered sources, mostly based on intelligence reports, one can assume the influence these two brothers had on the life and mind of Asad.

- i) After his conversion, first in Berlin and then in Cairo, Asad hastened to reach Saudi Arabia where he spent five years (1927-1932) and enjoyed all the facilities of a dignified person. The Saudi government treated him as a royal guest as he was considered one of the closest friends of the ruler—Ibn Sa'ūd (1880-1953). Sir Andrew Ryan, British Ambassador in Jiddah, remarks that Leopold Weiss "appears to have embraced Islam

²² A Tribute to the Late Muhammad Asad. Islamic Information Service, USA, 1988.

In 1933, Sir Andrew Ryan, a British Ambassador in Jiddah, mentioned 'Abdul Jabbār with reference to Asad's conversion.

He reported that Asad "appears to have embraced Islam with numerous Germans in or before 1926, under the auspices of Dr. Jabbār Khairi..."

(See his "Personalities in Saudi Arabia", in: Robin Bidve (ed.): *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*. Pt. II, Series B. Turkey, Iran and the Middle East 1918-1939. vol. 9. Eastern Affairs, June 1933—May 1934. University Publications of America, p. 36).

with numerous Germans in or before 1926 under the auspices of Dr. Jabbar Khair[i], who introduced him to Ibn Sa'ūd."²³ 'Abdul Jabbār and his brother Abdus Sattār, took an active part in Syria and in Turkey as a member of Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress but their contact with an Arabian monarch is entirely a new aspect of their political manoeuvring.

- ii) Before coming to Berlin (September 1918), 'Abdul Jabbār Khairi also toured Russia where he frequently addressed a large number of learned people and emphasized that only "Islamic principle could solve the problems of the time."²⁴ No doubt, he was a staunch progressive Muslim and an aspirant of freedom from the yoke of the British colonialism. He was highly anti-British. For British intelligence of the time, Bolshevism was an obsession. Therefore, he was labeled as a Bolshevist who was spreading Soviet communism everywhere. German scholars like Höpp refuted such allegations²⁵ but some intelligence reports of the British government branded both 'Abdul Jabbār Khairi and Muhammad Asad as Bolshevists.

In late 1928, an Iraqi named 'Abdullah Damluji, who had been an adviser to Ibn Sa'ūd, submitted a report to higher British authorities under the title "Bolshevik and Soviet Penetration", in which Asad was suspected to have some connection with the Bolshevik consulate in Jiddah.²⁶ In this regard Sir Muhammad Yamīn Khan refers to a C.I.D. report in which it was stated that "Asad was staying in Srinagar (Kashmir) and waiting for a person who was coming from Russia. According to a secret report received from Jiddah, a few Muslims assembled during Haj and exchanged their political ideas. Asad brought some of them from Mecca to Jiddah and introduced them to the Russian consulate. The names of those persons are given in the report but it is a classified document."²⁷ Another report says that Asad was spreading Bolshevik ideas in

²³ See above, under note 22. Muhammad Aman Herbert Hobohm (b. 1926), a German Muslim of Jamā'at-i Ahmadiyyah (Lahore) who spent a few years in German Embassy in Pakistan as an Information Attaché and married a Muslim woman of Lahore. Gerhard Höpp also pointed out 'Abdul Jabbār Khairi's efforts to introduce Asad to Ibn Sa'ūd. In his own interview (1988), Asad has also mentioned Khairi's recommendation letter to Ibn Sa'ūd. (see Windhager, op. cit., p. 178, f.n. 629).

²⁴ cf. *Zamindar*, 10 August 1923.

²⁵ See Windhager, op. cit., p. 179, f.n. 630.

²⁶ See Martin Kramer's article, included in this book, f.n. 17.

²⁷ *Nāma-i A'māl*, see my article, "Muhammad Asad's Indian Years (1932-1947)".

Srinagar (1933).²⁸ In the same year, Sir Andrew Ryan also reported about Asad as “suspected of Communist *attaches*, so much that Dr. Jabbar Khairi himself came later to the conclusion that his converts were Communists turned Moslem to be able to penetrate Moslem communities.”²⁹

As stated by Muhammad Yamīn Khan, Asad was a “potential danger” for the British government and all these secret reports are based on this fear. In fact, the so-called connection between Asad and Communism is a mystery about which it is difficult to know the truth.

- iii) ‘Abdul Jabbār Khairi and ‘Abdus Sattār Khairi were deeply committed to the political ideology of the Muslim League. They are also known in the history of the idea of Pakistan as the first Muslim scholars who proposed for partition of the Indian subcontinent into Muslim and Hindu provinces.³⁰ Their suggestion of a separate homeland for Muslims was submitted in a Socialist Internationale which was held in Stockholm in or about 1917—the year when Soviet Revolution took place.³¹ Strangely enough, as Dr. Javid Iqbal disclosed, that in 1930s a German(?) helped Muhammad Iqbal for quite a long time to prepare maps showing the majority and minority districts of Muslims in India.³² This unknown German may be Muhammad Asad who was fully conversant with Khairi Brothers’ religio-political ideas and honoured Iqbal as his “spiritual father.”
- iv) Khairi Brothers belonged to a respectable Hanafi family of Delhi but some of their Indian colleagues in Berlin opined that they were *ghair muqallid* and in certain religious beliefs they toed the line of Ahl-i Hadith or Wahhabism.³³ After conversion as a close associate of ‘Abdul Jabbār Khairi, Asad also followed the same track that led him to Saudi Arabia where Wahhabism became the religious ideology of the state. Then he proceeded to

²⁸ Martin Kramer’s article, op. cit., f.n. 25.

²⁹ Op. cit., under note 22.

³⁰ Cf. *Comité Organisateur de la Conference Internationale de Stockholm*. Ed. Tiden Forlog. Stockholm 1918, Ch. 14, pp. 407-408.

³¹ See Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada: *Evolution of Pakistan*, Lahore 1963; pp. 86-89; Syed Shamsul Hasan: *...Plain Mr. Jinnah*, Karachi 1976, pp. 265-277; Saad R. Khairi: *Jinnah Reinterpreted. The Journey from Indian Nationalism to Muslim Statehood*. Karachi: OUP, 1995, p. 333.

³² See A. Schimmel’s article in: *Muhammad Iqbal und drei Reiche des Geistes* von Wolfgang Koehler. Hamburg 1977, pp. 43-44, also Javid Iqbal’s Urdu autobiography *Apna Garibān Chāk*. Lahore 2003.

³³ Zamindar, 24 December 1922; 19 January 1923 for detail.

India and made early contacts with reputed '*ulama*' of Ahl-i Hadith. During his long stay in India and Pakistan he joined leading religious seminaries of Ahl-i Hadith for improving his Hadith studies and established close friendship with the religious scholars and political leaders of this persuasion. For this reason, even to-day, several '*ulama*' consider him a firm adherent of their religious community.³⁴

Muhammad Asad and 'Abdul Majid Sindhi

As stated in an intelligence report of the British government, Asad reached Karachi straight from Saudi Arabia and from there he proceeded to Amritsar and met Ismā'īl Ghaznawi, a member of Ahl-i Hadith family of Ghaznawi '*ulama*' and a close friend of Ibn Sa'ūd. On the contrary, Sir Yamīn Khan pointed out that after coming to India Asad rushed to meet 'Abdul Majid Sindhi (1889-1978) who was also a converted Muslim (s/o Lila Ram). As a staunch follower of the Muslim League, he was later appointed as the chief minister of the Sindh province.³⁵ There is no other source available to verify this information. Therefore, it is difficult to find any other common factor in their relationship except conversion.



Muhammad Asad died at the advanced age of ninety-two (1900-1992) and he spent most of his momentous part of life in Islamic world or in such countries where Muslims were in dominant position. First he combed the Middle East as a correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung*. After embracing Islam, he hurried off to Arabia and strengthened his contacts, spiritually as well as politically. Equipped with certain ideological convictions, he embarked for India where many drastic changes took place in his way of life and thinking. Afterwards, strangely enough, he never thought of residing permanently in his 'ideal' Islamic state of Pakistan or in Saudi Arabia and preferred to spend the rest of his life in other countries like Switzerland, Morocco, Portugal and finally Spain.

³⁴ See my article "Muhammad Asad's Indian Years (1932-1947)".

³⁵ *Nāma-i Ā'māl*, see my article, op. cit. The translation of concerned passage (dated 1st January 1941) is as follows:

"He [Asad] is an intimate friend of 'Abdul Majid Sindhi and after coming from Mecca he stayed with him. I know 'Abdul Majid very well. Now, he is minister in Sindh and often comes to Delhi for participating in the sessions of the Muslim League."

For 'Abdul Majid Sindhi, see *Biography of Muslim India (1857-1947)*. A *Biographical Dictionary*. By Ahmad Saeed. Repr.: Lahore 2005 (1997), pp. 24-25; see also Nur Muhammad Pathan's English book on 'Abdul Majid Sindhi, published from Jamshoro, Hyderabad Sindh.

Apparently, he spent the later part of his life as a rolling stone who had no fixed address and ultimately his restless soul found an eternal abode in a remote part of Spain—a country that rests for ever in the historic nostalgia of the Muslims.

Like Asad's spiritual journey that led him to Mecca, his intellectual quest also took him to a 'book' that was first revealed in the same city. As a young Muslim scholar, the subject that attracted him was East-West relations and the varied problems, arising from their encounter and *mélange*. In this perspective, he deeply pondered over the issues, the entire Islamic world was facing, especially the survival of Islam against the onslaught of Western civilization. Besides, he devoted all his efforts to have a geographical entity which would be an exemplary model of an Islamic state. Intellectually, he provided an impetus to see such an independent state on the map of the world and laid down its basic principles, as envisaged by Iqbal. Simultaneously, he continued his scholarly studies and enriched Islamology with his thoughtful articles and useful translations.

Asad's extensive traveling, his intimate relations with the political and religious leaders of the Islamic world and his wide range of scholarship called for a competent and devoted scholar who could prepare any detailed or introductory book, dealing with his life and works, but nobody paid any such written homage to this celebrated Muslim genius and thinker of the present time, neither in his life nor after his demise.³⁶ In view of this indifferent attitude of Asad's co-religionists, some Islamicists of Austria—a country where Asad was born—and his close friends took the initiative and decided to celebrate his 100th Birth Anniversary in 2000 under the aegis of Orient Gesellschaft Hammer-Purgstall (Vienna). On this occasion, a symposium was held (18 May) in the premises of this Viennese Society in which a collection of Asad's rare photographs, obtained from his step-son, Heinrich Ahmad Schiemann (1918-2002), also displayed. In the same year, a young Austrian scholar named Günter Windhager (b. 1964)³⁷ commenced a research project concerning the early part of Asad's life (1900-1927)³⁸ and after two years it was published with the financial support of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and

³⁶ Soon after Asad's death, Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal (Canada) planned to write his biography and submitted its tentative outline of his undertaking (cf. *Islamic Studies*, 37/3 (1998), pp. 411-414) but for certain reasons, he had to discontinue it.

³⁷ He was born in Steyr (Upper Austria); studied Ethnology, Cultural and Social Anthropology in the University of Vienna and now an associate of Austrian Academy of Sciences (Vienna).

³⁸ For this project, Wittgensteinpreises provided the funds.

Culture (Austria).³⁹ In January 2005, a French book entitled *Un Juif pour l'Islam*⁴⁰ appeared, written by a French anthropologist, Florence Heymann. Basically, she has paraphrased Windhager's German book, at least upto the year of Asad's conversion (1927) and added nothing new except an interview of Talal Asad (New York), taken immediately after 9/11. Two months after the appearance of this French book, Kulturverein Kanafani (Vienna) published a small collection of articles on Asad (March 2005) that gives a vivid picture of Asad's life and introduces the readers about his contribution to Islamic studies.⁴¹

I must admit here that after going through Windhager's aforementioned well-documented book, I conceived the idea of preparing a volume on Asad's life and works. Primarily, my intention was to supplement it with a detailed biographical account of Asad, from 1928 onwards. Gradually, this idea was developed and the recent French and German books prompted me to complete the book as early as possible in English, because not a single book on Asad's biography and scholarly pursuits has been so far appeared in this language of universal significance. As time lapsed, several drastic changes crept in which caused the revision and expansion in the primary idea of this book. Finally, it became a huge project comprising two volumes, (interspersed with the reproduction of rare documents), under the title *Muhammad Asad: Europe's Gift to Islam*.⁴² The first volume has been divided in the following three sections:

- i) Personality, Biography, Works etc. (including annotations to the autobiographical passages of *The Road to Mecca* and my article "Muhammad Asad's Indian Years (1932-1947)" as a sequel to this spiritual journey.
- ii) Studies: Appreciation, Evaluation and Criticism (Like any

³⁹ Published under the title *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad. Von Galizien nach Arabien 1900-1927*, with an introduction by Andre Gingrich. Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2002, pp.230; reprinted: 2003.

⁴⁰ Published from Éditions Stock, Paris; pp. 304 out of which 228 pages deal with Asad's early part of his life (1900-1927) and entirely reproduced Windhager's information along-with his photographs and bibliography of Asad's writings. The rest of the book (pp. 229-285) is based on the secondary sources.

⁴¹ This collection came out in a journal *Der Wisch* (Nr. 3, pp. 39, Vienna), including the articles by Prof. Anas Schakfeh, Murad W. Hofmann, Reinhard Schulze etc.

⁴² This title has been taken from Murad W. Hofmann's article "Europas Geschenk an den Islam" which he presented in a symposium (Vienna) on the occasion of Asad's 100th Birth Anniversary (2000) and was later reproduced in *Der Wisch* (Vienna, No. 3, March 2005), pp. 14-21.

thinker of high caliber, Asad also has admirers and critics whose writings are characterized by careful appreciative or critical views. Such subjective and objective studies of Asad's personality, religious concepts and political thought will help the readers to understand his *Gedankenwelt* in a real perspective.

- iii) Reviews (also includes book reviews of or on Asad by those scholars who converted to Islam after reading his books).

Second volume consists of Asad's own writings arranged in a chronological order, from the beginning (1923) upto to 1985. All his articles, published in his own journal *Arafat* (Dalhousie/Lahore, 1946-1948) have been reproduced here. At the end, except Addenda, a comprehensive bibliography of Asad's works and relevant sources (original, secondary and tertiary) has been given. Numerous photographs, showing the different phases of Asad's life, have also been given and an attempt has been made to present a pictorial sketch of his life from the cradle (Lemberg) to the grave (in the Muslim Cemetery, Grenada, Spain).

One of the distinctive aspects of Asad's *The Road to Mecca* is its vision of Islam that has drawn many talented Europeans and Americans to the Faith. One of such converted Muslims is Murad Wilfried Hofmann⁴³ who considers Asad as a "Europe's Gift to Islam" (*Europas Geschenk an den Islam*)⁴⁴—the title of the present book. After his conversion, Asad devoted his life to Islam and entirely identified himself with the Muslim world. Iqbal, his "spiritual father"⁴⁵ and some other distinguished savants of the time welcomed this European gift with open arms but afterwards, due to certain political and religious pressures, it was given back to Europe. The main objective of the present work is to bring this Europe's gift back to Islamic world, as the contemporary global situation needs such modern Muslim thinkers like Muhammad Asad to follow their footprints and try to establish an 'ideal' Islamic state for which Muhammad Asad dreamt.

Lahore
6.3.2006

M. Ikram Chaghatai

⁴³ Born 6th July 1931 into a Catholic family in Aschaffenburg (Germany); served as Director of Information for NATO at Brussels (1983-87) Ambassador to Algeria (1987-90) and Ambassador to Morocco (1990-94); embraced Islam in 1980.

⁴⁴ See *Der Wisch* (Vienna), March 2005, op. cit.

⁴⁵ See my article "Muhammad Asad's Indian Years (1932-1947)".



Muhammad Asad: a few months before his death (1992)

3

LIFE OF MUHAMMAD ASAD (CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED)

- 1900 Leopold Weiss was born on 2nd July in Lwów/Lviv (Lemberg), a city of eastern Galicia under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now in Ukraine.
- 1910—1913 Studied Jewish scripture and fluently spoke Hebrew.
- 1914 His family shifted to Vienna.
- 1914—1917 Schooling in Vienna.
- 1917—1918 Schooling in Czernowitz.
- 1918—1920 Joined Austrian army but soon Habsburg Monarchy collapsed; entered the University of Vienna and studied philosophy, history of art, physics and chemistry.
- 1919 His mother, Amalia (also named Mala and Malka) Weiss (b. 7.11.1875, Lemberg; married 7.6.1895), died at the age of forty-four.
- 1920—1922 Left Vienna (Autumn 1920); Lived in Berlin where he met Elsa Schieman (1878—1927), a painter, for the first time (end of 1922); her son, Heinrich Schieman, was born in 1916; travelled through Central Europe and worked at short-lived jobs; invited by his uncle Dorian, to come to Jerusalem.
- 1922—1923 First journey to the Middle East and visited Egypt, Transjordan, Syria and Turkey; invited by his paternal uncle, Dorian Feigenbaum, a psychiatric consultant to the Government of Palestine; Asad visited Palestine.
- 1923—1927 Correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung*.
- 1924 *Unromantisches Morgenland: Aus dem Tagebuch einer Reise*. Frankfurt/M.: Verlag der Frankfurter Societats-Druckerei, (pp. 159, with 59 b/w photographs).
- 1924—1926 Second trip to the Middle Eastern countries: Egypt, Amman, Syria, Tripoli and Iraq through the Kurdish mountains, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, across the Turkoman steppes to the Ural Mountains and Moscow.

- 1926 Resigned from *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Converted to Islam in Berlin and named Muhammad Asad.
- 1927 New contracts with the newspapers: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Zürich), *Kölnische Zeitung* (Cologne) and *De Telegraaf* (Amsterdam); conversion to Islam in Cairo and married Elsa Schiemann according to the Islamic law; first pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*); Elsa Schiemann died in Mecca (June) of Malaria-Tropica-infection.
- 1927—1932 Stayed in Saudi Arabia (proclaimed on 23 September 1932); close confidant of the King 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn 'Abdur Raḥmān ibn Faisal Āl-Sa'ūd, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia.
- 1928 Married in Saudi Arabia to a woman from the Mutayr tribe.
- 1930 Married to Munira bint Husayn ash-Shmmari of the As-Shammar tribe from Haa'il; their first son Ṭāriq died at birth.
- 1932 Birth of his second son, Ṭalāl Asad; left his wife and newly-born son in Saudi Arabia and set out for India.
- 1932—1939 Stayed in India (Amritsar, Lahore, Srinagar, Delhi, Hyderabad Deccan); met Muhammad Iqbal.
- 1934 *Islam at the Crossroads*. Delhi/Lahore: Arafat Publications.
- 1935—1938 Five instalments of Muhammad Asad's English translation of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with explanatory notes, published from Srinagar/Lahore: Arafat Publications; the project remained incomplete as the translator was interned during the Second World War; afterwards the whole manuscript of the remaining instalments was destroyed during the chaotic circumstances of the partition of the Subcontinent.
- 1937—1938 Editor of *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad, Deccan) from January 1937 to October 1938.
- 1939 Travelled to Europe (London) and tried to rescue his father, step-mother and sister from the Nazis; Heinrich Weiss, his brother, immigrated to Palestine.
- 1939—1945 During the Second World War (1st Sept. 1939—14th August 1945) he was an involuntary "guest" of the Government of India, with his second wife and son, because of his then Austrian citizenship.
- 1942 Muhammad Asad's efforts to bring his family members

- to India failed: his father, Dr. Kiwa (also called Akiva and Akiba, afterwards Karl) Weiss (b. 2.10.1872, Czernowitz), his step-mother, Berth Weiss, and his sister, Rachel Weiss, were deported to Theresienstadt where his father was shot dead.
- 1944 Berth and Rachel Weiss were deported from the internment camp in Auschwitz (Theresienstadt) to another encampment (Stutthof) and both were killed there by the Nazis.
- 1945—1947 Asad lived with his Arabian wife and his son in Dalhousie, East Punjab (present day Himachal Pradesh, India). Started publishing his journal, *Arafat* (10 issues).
- 1946—1947 *Arafat. A Monthly Critique of Muslim Thought*, edited and written by himself, was shifted to Lahore.
- 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan came into being; Asad and his family migrated from Dalhousie to Lahore and settled there.
- 1947—1952 Asad was appointed as the Director of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction, West Punjab (Lahore) and then Deputy Secretary and Incharge of the Middle East Division in the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Karachi).
- 1950 His son, Talāl, went to study in England.
- 1951 Returned to Saudi Arabia after about eighteen years, as an emissary of the Government of Pakistan.
- 1952 Ambassador of Pakistan in the United Nations (New York): Representative (Chairman) of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories and the member of the Disarmament Commission of the Security Council and the Pakistani Delegation; divorced his Arabian wife, Munira bint Husayn ash-Shammari, and married with Pola Hamida Kazimirska (New York), an American woman of Polish descent (November); resigned from the diplomatic service of Pakistan.
- 1952—1959 Lived in New York, Badenweiler in Switzerland, Beirut and Lahore.
- 1954 *The Road to Mecca*. New York: Simon and Shuster; London: Max Reinhardt.
- 1959—1964 Lived in Sharjah, Lebanon and Switzerland.
- 1960 *Islam und Abendland. Begegnung zweier Welten*, (see

- Bibliography).
- 1961 *The Principles of State and Government in Islam.*
Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- 1964—1981 Lived in Tangier (Morocco) with Pola.
- 1978 Munira bint Husayn ash-Shammari, his Arabian wife,
died in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- 1980 *The Message of the Qur'an.* Translated and explained by...
- 1983 Came to Pakistan on the invitation of the Government
to participate in the meeting of Ansari Commission
(July). During his last visit of this country, he was
interviewed in detail by PTV. From here he went back
to London (August 3).
- 1985 Left Tangier and moved to Lisbon (Portugal).
- 1987 *This Law of Ours and Other Essays.*
- 1987—1992 Returned to Spain.
- 1992 On 20th February died in Mijas (Malaga) in the
Andalusian province of Spain and buried in the Muslim
cemetery in Granada, Andalusia.

I

**PERSONALITY, BIOGRAPHY, WORKS
ETC.**

138219

ELMA RUTH HARDER* (Tr.)

MUHAMMAD ASAD AND THE ROAD TO MECCA

Text of Muhammad Asad's Interview with Karl Günter Simon

The white village hangs on the cliffs over that sunny coastline about which the Spaniards occasionally say: "Gibraltar might be ours once again, but never again the Costa del Sol". With its old church, the pilgrimage grotto, and the picturesque Plaza de Toros, the village is extremely interesting for anthropologists and sociologists, and has inspired three books. Twenty years ago eight thousand inhabitants lived here, two thirds on their little farms in the fields. Their life was burdensome. The villagers, excepting the large landowners, were bitterly poor. "In this year, 1988", says the nice Danish woman at the foreign office in Ayuntamiento, "we have 16,000 Spaniards and 32,000 *turistas residentes* — cottage dwellers from 52 countries". The vegetables are expensive, the fields have become trim residential gardens, the farmers have become bricklayers and waiters, and innumerable bars serve fried chicken or fish and chips. Donkeys carry tourists, and speedy mopeds screech throughout the night. The village, hardly accessible by car twenty years ago, appears today as one of the richest Spanish communities. The new city hall costs three million Marks.

One of the thousands of new houses is called Dār al-Andalus. That is the Arabic word for house. Although it appears Arabic-Spanish, Andalus actually has German roots. The Vandals were the first Germans to seek the sun here.

An Afghan shepherd dog sits like a statue beyond the garden

* The article was originally published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on November 18, 1988. The translator is grateful to Ron Peters for going through the first draft of the translation and for making valuable suggestions.

wall. A woman opens the door. She is North American, tells the curious taxi driver, who has strayed out here for the first time, "...and my husband is Austrian-Pakistani", which all seems rather complicated. Which language is best? "English", says the man at the door, "but Arabic and German are fine". And a bit later: "Whom do you still know from the *Frankfurter (Allgemeine) Zeitung*? Benno Reinfenberg, Paul Medina or Dr Heinrich Simon"? Personally, I know no one, not even Simon. In Berlin? "I met Bert Brecht in the Café des Westen, or was it in the Romanisches Café? Marlene Dietrich....Murnau. Do you remember Colin Ross"? Only the name. "We were the two travel reporters, Colin Ross and I - yes, I, that is, Leopold Weiss..."

Leopold Weiss has been forgotten. Muhammad Asad is famous, at least in the Islamic world. This year he turns 88.

"To achieve the rebirth of Islam we should not seek new models from the outside. We just need to revive the old forgotten principles. Foreign cultures may give us new impulses, but the perfect workshop of Islam cannot be replaced by anything un-Islamic, regardless of whether it originates in the West or the East. The spiritual and social institutions of Islam cannot be improved upon. What seems to be the downfall of Islam is in truth just the death and the emptiness in our hearts..." A polemic of the Muslim brotherhood? A proclamation of fundamentalists, whoever they might be? Not at all. These modern statements are found in an old book *Islam at the Crossroads*, written in 1933. This was the first book by Muhammad Asad, but not quite the first for the author. Twenty-four-year-old Leopold Weiss had written *The Unromantic East*, reports published by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. But with the second book, his pen went on strike. He wanted to get away from Frankfurt, home to the East. At thirty-two he wrote, "Far away, as in a dream, lies my Western past. It is not unreal enough to be forgotten, and not real enough to be a part of my present. Whenever I remain in a city for several months, an unrest grows within me, an urging to do and to move, towards the dry, fresh air of the desert, to the smell of the camels and their rocking gait..."

Heinrich Simon, the nephew of Leopold Sonnemann, the founder of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, fired his star writer. Leopold Weiss became Muhammad Asad, the reporter — a scholar of Islam.

Arab Muslims first told me of Muhammad Asad. I read his *Principles of State and Government in Islam*, a slim publication which gains weight with time as Muslims in politics seek their roots. "And it was Arabs who entrusted me with *The Road to Mecca*", the autobiography that

ends in 1932. Muhammad Asad decided, at 32, to leave Arabia and travel eastward to India. From then on his biography can only be reconstructed from fragments. Pakistan, New York, and then...? German Muslims told me they had seen the old Muhammad Asad in Makkah as a pilgrim. He was living in Tangiers. Finally a German ambassador, himself a Muslim, pointed us in the right direction.

The white village, Dār al-Andalus. "He grants no interviews anymore", Mrs. Pola Hamida tells us, but the name *Frankfurter* has perhaps made him sentimental. We sit at supper. Salmon from the supermarket in Marbella and fresh black German bread. "The best bread", says the old master, "was made by a baker in L'vov¹. I still have the taste on my tongue". L'vov? "Well, yes, Lemberg, that was then Austria. Do you know that Lemberg comes from 'Löwe' (lion), and when I converted to Islam in Berlin in 1926, the Indian Imam said to me, 'you are called Leopold, and leo means lion — therefore we take the Arabic name for lion, Asad'".

L'vov, Lemberg in 1900 was "a long street of somewhat dusty elegance, lined by chestnut trees and laid with small wooden bricks which muffle the hoofbeats of the horses and render every hour of the day into a lazy afternoon. I loved this lovely street with a much greater awareness than befit my young age, and not just because it was my childhood street. I loved it, I believe, for the stateliness with which it flowed from the lively centre of that most lively of all cities gradually to the edge of the city and then into the quiet of the woods and to the great cemetery, which found itself in the midst of the forest. Beautiful wagons passed occasionally on their rubber wheels to the lively, rhythmic trap-trap of horse hooves. Yet in the winter, when the street was covered foot-deep in snow, the sleighs flew over it and steam clouds issued from the nostrils of the horses, and their bells jingled in the frosty air..."

"Do you also find", says Mrs. Pola Hamida at the supper table, "that today the German written in the newspapers is worse than then"? Well, yes, after the war, presumably under the influence of the Americans, a magazine style took hold, and whoever has written such for a few years can never get out of it. "No, no", says the old Mr. Weiss-Asad, "not just in the *Stern* or *Spiegel*, but also in the newspapers. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* of that time..."

He learned German from his father, Polish from his mother.

¹ In German, Lwów. All proper names have been given their equivalent English spellings.

His father, a well-placed attorney, was born in the Bukovina region as son of the rabbi at Czernowitz; his mother was the child of a rich banker in L'vov. Thirteen-year-old Leopold read Sienkiewicz in Polish, Karl May, Nietzsche and Rilke in German, and the Torah and Talmud in Hebrew and Aramaic.

“Theological and philosophical ways of thinking did not stir me seriously at that time; that which I longed for deep inside did not differentiate itself intrinsically from desires and expectations of other boys of my age — action and exercise and adventure... The first decade of the European twentieth century stood under the sign of a spiritual emptiness. Most of the moral values, which for hundreds of years had been considered steadfast, were shattered under the terrible jolt of the world war, and no new values were at hand, to replace those which were lost. All seemed fragile. A feeling of inner insecurity hovered over the people, a premonition of communal and spiritual revolution, which left almost everyone doubting whether mankind's deed and thought would ever again attain the old firmness and constancy. Everything seemed to flow there in a shapeless flood, and the spiritual unrest of youth was unable to find a secure footing anywhere”.

This trend is noteworthy and well known. Also those who were born a generation later experienced and discovered the same thing after the end of the second world war in this century.

Can man save himself by merely resorting to adventure, or does he need any other deeds? He smuggled himself, as a fullgrown fourteen-year-old, into the Austrian army, but his father brought him back. When he reached the age of military service, the war was almost over. He experienced the University in Vienna, hunger in Prague, his first small successes in Berlin. He worked as a theatrical assistant for Murnau as a telephone operator, and finally, as a reporter for a news agency. “And one day, in the spring of 1922, I received a letter from my Uncle Dorian”. Uncle Dorian, Viennese student of Freud, administered a lunatic asylum in Jerusalem. “As he was a stranger to Zionism and had not much use for Arabs and in addition was a bachelor, he felt himself alone in a world which had nothing more to offer him than work and income, and in this lonesomeness he remembered his nephew. And so I found myself on the deck of a ship on my way to the East”.

The trip became a turning point in the life of the twenty-two-year-old. “I stood face to face with a totally new sensation. A warm human breath streamed from the blood of the Arabs in their thoughts and gestures; there was none of that painful soul-splitting to be seen,

those ghosts of fear, greed and inner dispossession which made European life so ugly and hopeless. Something began to open itself to me from the Arabs, something which I had always unknowingly been seeking. There was an emotional immediacy in every experience, an instinctive openness to all questions of existence — a reason of the heart, one could say”.

Destiny or chance? He once again became a journalist. “I wrote an essay on my impressions in Palestine and sent copies of it to ten German papers, with the offer to report regularly from the Middle East...Just one of the ten accepted my offer — apparently impressed by my essay — appointed me special correspondent to the Near East, and simultaneously proposed the draft of a contract for a book which I should write on my return. This paper was the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Yet there was a hook with it. Due to inflation, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was not in the position to pay me in English pounds. The honourarium offered to me, with a certain apologetic gesture, looked very impressive in German currency, but I knew very well, just as well as the editor’s office, that it would hardly suffice for the stamps to post my articles”.

The reporter travelled... on foot, on horseback, on swaying dromedaries... to Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Persia. He rode to Afghanistan through the wilderness of Saudi Arabia. His articles made him well known, not only in Germany, but also in the Arab press. He learned Arabic and Persian and started to study the Qur’an and Muslim writers. And in Berlin in 1926 he decided to take the incredibly unusual step: he converted to Islam.

“I can, without exaggeration, say that at that point in my life, Islam filled my thoughts to the exclusion of all other problems. Gone were the days when I considered this teaching at my leisure and gave myself in a carefree manner to those attractions which exerted new and strange *Weltanschauung* and culture on my spirit. From then on my preoccupation with Islam became a passionate search for truth. In comparison to this search even the adventurous discovery of the previous two years completely faded — so very faded that it was difficult for me to gather myself together to write the new travel book to which the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was entitled. Thoughts of the book became odious. I felt more and more impelled to make new discoveries, rather than to write about the old ones”.

So it came to the break with the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The man with the new name returned to the Orient and henceforth wrote for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the Dutch *Telegraaf* and the *Kölnische Zeitung* under

the name Weiss-Asad.

Mrs. Pola Hamida gets the photo album which she had, put together for her husband, after she had found the old negatives: clay palaces, the author in Arab garb, his Bedouin wife with and without veil, many famous leaders of the East who have long been history already — luminaries like 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ūd; Faysal, his son and heir; the Great Sanusi; Reza Khan, the late Shah of Persia. Actually, when one sees his life, he must have been as famous as Lawrence of Arabia. Does it depend on the name? "Well, yes", says Muhammad Asad, smiling, "Lawrence had a good biographer — Lowell Thomas made him famous". Lawrence has become an English legend. Though he was a friend of the Arabs, he still remained English. "And I — I crossed over to the other camp".

Henceforth he was a man of the Islamic world. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ūd, the new King of Saudi Arabia, gave him his trust and friendship. Six years in Riyadh and Madinah and long rides through the wilderness made him into an Arab. He dressed as a Bedouin, spoke Bedouin Arabic, and had a wife and child in Madinah. In 1929 he rode as a secret agent for his Arab ruler to Kuwait. The English, he discovered, were supporting the Bedouin uprising in the north against the central rule of the King. Maria Theresa thalers and arms were landing in Kuwait. The English wanted to weaken 'Abd al-'Aziz and they planned a naval base in the Persian Gulf and a rail line from Haifa to Basra. A series of articles by Muhammad Asad led to the collapse of these plans. Another life-threatening mission failed. The Great Sanusi who lived in Madinah sent the young Muslim through British Egypt to Libya, where the Sanusi Brotherhood fought desperately against the Italian invasion. The messenger, chased by the Italians, turned back without having accomplished anything. The guerilla fighters, cut off from all supplies, died in concentration camps, on the gallows of the Italians. This proved to be a quickly forgotten episode, but perhaps also a key to the character of Libyan politics? The picture of King 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ūd has a place of honour in the living room. "When King Faisal, Ibn Sa'ūd's son, was murdered", says Mrs. Pola Hamida, "I saw my husband cry for the only time in his life".

And why did he become a Muslim? Was it the fascination of the East? "I want to tell you a story", says Muhammad Asad. "During the second world war, I was interned in India. I was the only Muslim among three thousand Nazis and a hundred Anti-Fascists. One day in the camp, I came into conversation with the Prince of Lowenstein, who was a

Jesuit and a missionary. 'You were born a Jew', he said to me, 'and naturally the next step would be to become a Christian'. I asked him if he could answer a question I had: 'What is the trinity?' 'Oh', said the Prince, 'that is a mystery, when you have faith, then your heart will understand...' Do you see, that is why I am a Muslim. Islam says, 'Use your intellect, and you will find faith'. The dedication of his life's work, the translation of the Qur'an, states: *li-qawmin yatafakkarun*, "for people who think". And what of the Sufis, the mystics? "Mysticism means to deepen religious thinking and feeling. But the basis is not feeling, it is intellect".

Up to this point Muhammad Asad has written his own life story, but it is merely the first chapter of a long life. His autobiographical book, *The Road to Mecca*, begins in Lemberg and ends in the Holy City, which stands at the centre of the Islamic world. He was thirty-two years old when he left the Arabs — and yet the book seems notably complete, as if he had finished his goal. "He is a Bedouin", says Mrs. Pola, "we have always wandered".

He possessed, however unsettled his life was, a gift for making friendships. He remained close to his Saudi friends all his life long. "In Madinah, I learned to know many Indian Muslims. I wanted to be in India for a year". In Lahore, Muhammad Asad met Muhammad Iqbal, the writer now honoured as spiritual father of Pakistan, and again a friend who determined his life's direction. He made a friend for life. Iqbal, surprised by the sharp, outspoken young Muslim, persuaded him to stay in Lahore and work for the cause of Islam. In 1934, *Islam at the Crossroads* appeared. This was a book that held a clear mirror before all Muslims, not just for the Indians. It showed hard realities and also the direction to a new way.

"Islamic society is ossified", writes Asad, the lion. "It can absorb the stimuli of a technically superior civilization, namely that of the West, but it must return to its own roots, to overcome the decadence. Prophet Muhammad had advocated the seeking of knowledge, the principle of *ijtihad*, the exertion of one's own judgment, was the basis of the great Arab civilization. European thought, the age of science which has lasted till now, would not have occurred without the stimuli of the Arabs. Thanks to Islam, the European Renaissance freed itself of the chains of the church of the Middle Ages, for the science of the Arabs and the Persians had its roots in the teachings of the Prophet. Only in the following centuries when the Abbasids and Mamluks ruled, was the door of *ijtihad* locked. The principle of *taqlid* — blind acceptance

without one's own judgment — ruled and created the decadence of the Islamic world". Muhammad Asad later told the periodical *Arabia*: "To turn away the evil of Western civilization is one thing; to accept their benefits is another. I likely would have never become a Muslim if the schools of Europe had not instructed my understanding".

A critic of his books writes that Muhammad Asad was against the "politicians" and against the "mullahs". With this statement in fact he has hit the sore exactly. Till today the Islamic world is looking for this narrow way which runs between two rocks and promises salvation. The politicians open themselves up to Westernization and thereby give up their roots; the mullahs hold fast to their roots, but they become rigid. The politicians — [Z.A.] Bhutto in Pakistan or the Shah of Persia — have failed up to now; the rigid mullahs, as in Khomeini's Iran, offer no promising future perspective. The right way leads through the middle, that also is wisdom of the Qur'an, an instruction for "people who think", *li-qawmin yatafakkarun*.

In 1946 Asad went to Kashmir and founded a periodical, which he himself wrote. It was called '*Arafat* like the plain before the gates of Makkah where pilgrims spend the 9th day of Dhu'l-Hijjah in huge camps. In 1947 Pakistan was born as the only modern state to be established on the fundamentals of Islam. In the bloody disorder which accompanied the partitioning of British India, even the library of the scholar was destroyed. His translation of the *Hadith* of Bukhāri, that monumental collection of teachings of the Prophet [peace be on him], was never completed. The scholar who at one time had been a reporter then moved into politics. The government called him to the Department of Islamic Reconstruction, whose mandate was to build the ideological framework for the new Islamic state.

"He has forgotten a few years", says Muhammad Asad. From 1939 to 1945 he sat in an internment camp. "I was the only Muslim, and the Muslim soldiers who watched me wanted to let me escape, but I steered away from that". And what did he do in the camp, for six long years? "Nothing. We were housed in seventy-men barracks. What could we do there? Once, at Christmas, we fought with the Fascists — we won, because we were sober and they were drunk".

"Six years — a man's best years", says Mrs. Pola. "The black hole is a richly coloured biography. We have forgotten it". The black hole: things forgotten, repressed, flashes of intense memories which sink back into the merciful darkness. "My father disappeared in Theresienstadt. After the *Anschluss* I had supplied him with a visa to the

Punjab, but he did not want to flee without his daughter. When I also sent my sister a visa, she lost the letter. She died in Auschwitz".

"Tell the story about the oil", says Mrs. Pola.

"Oh, yes, the English accused me, as confidant of Ibn Sa'ūd, of obtaining the oil concession for the Americans and not the English. It was all madness".

"Then we would be millionaires today", says Mrs. Pola.

In 1949 Muhammad Asad joined the diplomatic service of Pakistan. He, of course, took charge of the Middle East Department. In 1950 he went back to visit Arabia. "There was still no passport law, I declined to travel with a British passport and received the very first Pakistani passport". Until then he had had an old Austrian passport. He replied to a written summons from the German consul to become a pan-German citizen with his response "Götz from Berlichingen". In 1952 Pakistan sent him as representative to the UN in New York. As Chairman of the Commission of Non-Selfgoverned Territories, he argued for the independence of Tunisia. Burgiba later invited him as a state guest.

In New York, the third chapter in the life of Muhammad Asad-Leopold Weiss began. He met Pola. This American woman had become a Muslim even before she met the diplomat. "He fascinated me", she recalls, "with his brilliance". [Asad now divorced his wife from Saudi Arabia.] The Pakistan Foreign Office refused to agree to the marriage. Asad quickly decided, as he often had in life, to leave the diplomatic service; he started to write once more.

The Road to Mecca appeared in nine months, the story of his youth and his conversion. The book was a success, and not only in Muslim countries. "Allah alone knows", wrote the periodical *Arabia* thirty years later, "how many other converts were on their way to faith because of this rousing book". It was translated into Japanese, Malaysian, Serbo-Croatian and nine other languages. The film version with Gregory Peck as Muhammad Asad, remained a plan. The publisher, Gottfried Beermann-Fischer, who met the author in New York, invited him to write the German version in Germany. For a year, Leopold Weiss-Asad lived with his wife Pola in Badenweiler, in the house of Annette Kolb.

The Black Forest had no more hold on him than did Frankfurt. The East beckoned him again, as unromantic as it was. He spent two years in Beirut, where he wrote *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, a brilliant theory of the Islamic state, going back to the roots of.

the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. He lived in Pakistan another year, then again attempted to find his way back to Europe to his own roots. He lived in Switzerland for six years, where he started his major work, the English translation of the Qur'an. "I calculated it would take two years, then it became seventeen years. One digs deeper and deeper".

These were modest words for a major work. Whoever pages through the book's thousand dense pages must think, 'Oh good, one of eighty-five English translations', but then one gets lost in the fullness of the commentary, the richness of the thought, which builds a bridge between two worlds. Asad doesn't just seek counsel of the authorities like Bukhāri, Ibn Rushd to Muḥammad 'Abduh. He has learned the complex language at its source with the Bedouins in the Arabian wilderness.

"All translators", he writes in the foreword, "were people who acquired their knowledge of Arabic through academic study alone: that is, from books. But the Arabic of the Qur'an is the language of a people endowed with that peculiar quick-wittedness which the desert and its expanses inspires, the language of people whose mental images quickly, and without mediation, fly, flowing without effort from association to association-sequences of thought that slowly approach the idea which they aim to express".

Every translation of such a language will necessarily be its own interpretation. The famous *ayah* 190 in Surah al-Baqarah, to give just one example, is translated by Asad like this: "And fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression — for, verily, God does not love aggressors". The oldest reference to *jihād*, the idea which is so often misunderstood in the West, is here clearly defined: a prohibition of offensive war, a commandment for defense.

Asad discovers the key to understanding of this great and mysterious book in the Surah Al-Imran, *ayah* 7: "He it is who has bestowed upon thee from on high this divine writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves — and these are the essence of the divine writ — as well as others that are allegorical. Now those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the divine writ which has been expressed in allegory, seeking out (what is bound to create) confusion, and seeking (to arrive at) its final meaning (in an arbitrary manner); but none save God knows its final meaning".

"It is this verse", comments Asad, "in its absolute sense, which gives the key to understanding the Quranic message which makes the

whole accessible to the people who think”.

The unambiguous signs (*ayat muhkamat*) have but one meaning, but the allegorical signs (*ayat mutashabihat*) spell out what lies beyond the human cognition. “It is this concept that builds the foundation for the understanding of the Qur’an and the principles of religion in general, for all religious knowledge builds on the fact that only a small portion of the reality of human thought and human fantasy is accessible and the larger portion is locked from comprehension”.

Asad continually emphasizes the rationality of Islam: “Most surely the Qur’an is disregarded in the West because in one aspect it differs from all other scriptures: it stresses reason as a way to faith, and it asserts the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical spheres of human existence”.

The Message of the Qur’an appeared in 1980, the author’s eightieth year of life, the culmination of a life’s work which began with travel pictures on the first page of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The reporter viewed; the politician did; the wise man understood. These have been the three chapters of his life. Lawrence of Arabia pales into insignificance.

In 1987, after fourteen years in Tangiers, and then four years in Portugal, Muhammad Asad moved to Marbella, where the Arabs live in the summer.

When I visited him, he had just moved again, to the white village we cannot name. The man wants his peace.

In one of his essays, he speaks of “mutual distrust” between Arabs and Europeans. He explains it like this: “It still stems from the time of the Crusades. The European encounters other strange religions, say Buddhism, without prejudice, but the aversion to Islam lies deep in his unconscious”. Doesn’t it also lie in the character of the Arabs, whom we Europeans have a hard time understanding? Arabs seem, especially in association with journalists, often locked and inaccessible. “No, no, Arabs are open and good-natured”, says Asad, who has never felt himself so much at home with friends as in Saudi Arabia.

At that time, I add, there were no terrorists, no fanatic combat organizations like Hizb Allah or al-Jihad-al-Islami. Isn’t it understandable that the people of the West become shocked with Khomeini? “Khomeini has done for Islam what Hitler did for Germany”, says Muhammad Asad. He smiles, “He was, by the way, born in the same year as I”.

He takes off his glasses. “Have you read Koestler — The Thirteenth Race? Koestler has maintained that the Ashkinazi, the

Eastern Jews, didn't even descend from the Jews, but from the Chasaren, the descendants of a Turkish race from the Central Steppes, from where the Mongols also came. Look at me..." Age has drawn his features sharper, the cheekbones protrude, the eyes lie in narrow slits. "And when you speak of fanaticism, the Qur'an clearly says in the second Surah, We have wished that you be a people of the middle way. The Sunnah prohibits *tafrit* and *ifrat*, excess in small things as in large things. In the Sunnah it also says, God has wished that which is easy for you, not the difficult".

In the evening, with chocolate mousse in the village tavern, he lapses into silence. "Say something", says Mrs. Pola, "I'm considering", says the old Bedouin quietly, "whether or not we should move again..." It really is too lonely in the white village, among all the *turistas residentes*.

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MUHAMMAD ASAD/GERHARD SZEZESNY

THE ANSWERS OF ISLAM

(Published in German in the 1960s by Szczesny Verlag, Munich)

Author's Note

The following answers to a series of pertinent questions are the result of a questionnaire posed by the well-known German publisher Gerhard Szczesny, in collaboration with the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation (Bayerischer Rundfunk), to several selected representatives of the great world religions. My own contribution, comprising answers from the *Islamic* point of view, was subsequently re-broadcast in several Muslim and non-Muslim countries and finally published in book form, together with the answers of the other participants, under the title *Die Antwort der Religionen*, which is still in print. I am grateful to Mr. Szczesny for permission to reproduce here my own answers, which I have translated into English.

I. MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

1

(Q) *How would you describe the relationship between our world and our reality on the one side, and that other, supernatural reality to which all religions refer? Is that which we can perceive and describe but a limited, sensually approachable aspect of one all-embracing reality, or is it that "our" and that "other" world are two entirely different categories of existence?*

(A) Within the Islamic conception of reality the question of its division into "natural" and "supernatural" categories does not arise. Everything that is and happens or, conceivably, could be or happen is a result of God's creative activity — and is, therefore, not only "natural" in the innermost sense of this term, but also belongs to one and the same, conceptually integrated reality. Certain aspects of this multi-faceted, complex reality are directly open to human insight and comprehension and are, therefore, referred to in the Qur'an as the "observable sphere of

Being" (*‘alam ash-shahādah*), while certain other of its aspects remain temporarily or even permanently beyond the reach of human perception and belong, accordingly, to the "non-observable sphere" (*‘alam al-ghayb*). Some aspects of that latter sphere or category will reveal themselves to man's perception and understanding at the next stage of his existence — that is, in his life after death — whereas other aspects are destined to remain forever within the exclusive knowledge of God. With all this, however, both these spheres of Being — those which are *a priori* perceptible by man as well as those which are temporarily or permanently non-perceptible — are but parts of one and the same reality which flows from God: for, as the Qur'an states, He is "the Self-Subsistent Fount of all Being" (*al-qayyūm*). Hence, a Muslim is never tempted to visualise the concept of "reality" in a dualistic sense. Moreover, since the entire teaching of the Qur'an aims at an unceasing deepening of man's consciousness and a constant widening of his spiritual experiences, the boundary lines between that which is *a priori* observable and that which lies beyond man's perception are by no means rigid or final even in this present life; and it is for this reason that we Muslims do not admit of any qualitative or even conceptual separation of "our" reality from that sphere of existence which is not open to our senses or is beyond the potential limits of our understanding: for us, *all* reality is one and indivisible.

2

(Q) *Does the "other reality" become in any way apparent within "our" reality? What possibilities are open to man to learn anything about it: that is to say, whether it exists at all and what might be its characteristics? What role may be ascribed in this context to revelations, sacred books, and to religious traditions in general? Are there miracles—that is, happenings in which the "other reality" reveals itself through a suspension of the laws and conditions prevalent in "our" reality?*

(A) As I have already explained in my answer to the preceding question, Islam does not conceive of "reality" in a dualistic sense but, rather, discerns in all of it an intrinsic unity: namely, a many-layered and multi-faceted revelation of God's creative Will. Hence, for us Muslims there is no question of "another" reality as an antithesis to "ours": we differentiate only between the perceptible and the non-perceptible aspects of one and the same totality. On the other hand, it may sometimes happen that one or another of those aspects of reality which

are normally beyond human perception reveals itself to a person's searching intellect and perhaps even to his or her senses, either through a personal, intuitive cognition or, in a more general and usually more enduring manner, as a result of systematic research, be it individual or collective: for, a good deal of what is normally unknown to us need not always *remain* unknowable. This applies, in particular, to our cognition of God's unceasing creativeness in both the concrete and the abstract aspects of the universe. This creative activity is described in the Qur'an as "God's way" (*sunnat Allāhi*); and it encompasses all that is conceived of as "the laws of nature". It follows, therefore, that many of those facets of reality which, at first sight, are unknown to us may become accessible to human understanding by way of a systematic observation of various natural phenomena and a study of their mutual relations: in other words, by means of scientific research. And because, as I have already mentioned, Islam aims at a continuous, widening and deepening of man's consciousness, the Qur'an stresses again and again the importance of our *study of nature* as one of the foremost ways towards a deeper understanding of God's creative activity through which He reveals to us His Being. Both the Qur'an and the authentic teachings of the Apostle of God are full of admonitions in this respect: and herein lies an explanation of the Muslims' tremendous achievements, during the early centuries of Islam, in the domain of natural sciences and the development of a truly scientific methodology.

It must, however, be borne in mind that scientific research alone cannot possibly unveil to us *all* aspects of reality: for, the endless diversity and mutual intertwining of the factors responsible for that reality places many of its aspects far beyond the limits of empirical research and scientific definition. Within this category—the category of what is beyond the reach of science as such, and therefore undiscoverable through its methods—lies the domain of *ethics*, which plays so dominant a role in human life and is, consequently, inseparable from what we describe as "reality". Hence, in order to provide for us the necessary guidance in the field of ethical valuations—a guidance which science cannot vouchsafe to us—God unveils to us the meaning of Good and Evil through what is termed "revelation": that is, the direct insight into ethical truths and their inter-relations granted by God to certain exceptional and exceptionally-receptive personalities described as "prophets". As the Qur'an repeatedly stresses, no human group or community (in the wider sense of these terms) has ever been left without such a prophetic guidance; and this principle of historical

continuity in the divine act of revelation represents one of the fundamental Qur'anic statements.

As regards the question of *miracles*, one must always remember that the Qur'anic expression *āyah* signifies not only a "miracle" in the sense of a happening which goes beyond or is *a priori* outside the usual (or usually observable) course of natural phenomena, but is also synonymous with "sign" and "message" in the abstract senses of these terms; and the last-named of these meanings is the one which is by far the most frequently met with in the Qur'an. Thus, what is commonly described as a "miracle" constitutes, in fact, an *unusual divine message* expressing—often in a symbolic manner—a spiritual truth which would otherwise have remained hidden from man's intellect. But even such extraordinary, miraculous messages cannot be regarded as "supernatural" for the simple reason that the so-called "laws of nature" are only a perceptible manifestation of "God's way" (*sunnat Allāhi*) in respect of His creation—and, consequently (as already mentioned), everything that exists or happens, or could conceivably exist or happen, is "natural" in the innermost sense of this word, irrespective of whether it conforms to the ordinary (or "usual") course of events or goes beyond it. And since, as a rule, such unusual messages reach us through one or another of those specially gifted, God-chosen personalities spoken of in His revelation as His messengers or prophets, the popular mind attributes to the latter the ability to "perform miracles"—a misconception which the Qur'an removes by the words: "Miracles (*al-āyāt*) are in the power of God alone" [lit., "are only with God"] (*surah* 6:109).

3

(Q) *Does scientific research play any significant role in man's cognition of the "other reality"? Must the statements of a religion be in accord with scientific findings, or is such an accord irrelevant? Does religion come to its own only at the point where all scientific explanation of cosmic truths reaches the end of its potentialities?*

(A) As for the role of science as such, it must be stressed that all scientific research—that is to say, a systematic observation of natural phenomena and a study of their inter-relations—is of utmost significance in the world-view of Islam, for it enables us to comprehend better and better the fact that all creation is based upon a definite divine plan, and is thus apt to strengthen and deepen our conviction of God's

existence and omnipotence. Since His eternal activity underlies all reality, the teachings of Islam attribute a quality of holiness to every research and endeavour aiming at a better understanding of the world around us and within us. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Striving after knowledge is a sacred duty (*faridah*) for every Muslim man and woman", and, "If anybody goes on his way in search of knowledge, God will make easy for him the way to Paradise"; and, "the superiority of the learned person over a [mere] worshipper is like the superiority of the moon on a night when it is full over [the light of] all the stars."

Since, as we know, all reality is a God-created unity, it follows that every scientific finding which is objectively proved to be true must *eo ipso* coincide with every truly religious tenet touching upon the nature of the universe. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, this inner coincidence between its statements and all such scientific findings as are proven beyond all possibility of doubt can be illustrated by many examples. To mention only a few, I would like to allude here to the doctrine of *evolution* referred to in the Qur'an again and again: the biological evolution of individual organisms (including the growth of the human embryo in its mother's womb) as well as the socio-historical evolution of human communities and civilisations; or to the innumerable Qur'anic references to the unceasing movement of all celestial bodies—stars, planets, solar systems and galaxies—and the mutual interdependence of their orbits; or to the principle of cause and effect which—as the Qur'an repeatedly states—underlies the being and the growth of all that exists.

In brief, it can safely be said that Islam is and has always been free of that "conflict between faith and science" which we so often encounter in other religions—for the simple reason that Islam does not *admit* of the existence of any conflict between religion and life as such, but rather recognises the fact that all intellectual activity is an inseparable element of life itself.

These observations are, I believe, sufficient to circumscribe the role which science plays in the over-all concept of Islam. However, we should not overlook a very important point: although science is well qualified to make us progressively comprehend something of the world around us and of the life within us, it is neither able nor called upon to pronounce a judgment regarding the *spiritual goal* of human life and thus to provide us with ethical guidance. In other words, the problem of ethical valuations—the problem of Good and Evil as well as the question as to how man should behave and what he should aim at—does not lie within the realm of science: it lies solely within the realm of

religion. Science is no more than one of the instruments which man's intellect has at its disposal in order to find a better and better orientation within the observable universe; and religion—in the Islamic sense of this word—must and does use this instrument in order to guide man towards a better and better spiritual and social existence.

4

(Q) *What role does emotion play in man's endeavour to approach the "other reality"? Are love of nature, art and literature, too, of importance for a religious comprehension of the universe?*

(A) As I have already stated, the Islamic conception does not admit of any "other" reality—that is, a supernatural category of existence in a hypothetical contrast—or even an antithesis—to those sectors of the universe which are *a priori* perceptible to us. For us, there is only *one* reality. Our comprehension of it can be widened and deepened by means of a conscious intellectual effort—for instance, empirical research or mathematical calculation—as well as through an intuitive perception of the inner links between certain phenomena which at first glance appear to be entirely unconnected. Man has undoubtedly the possibility to gain such intuitive flashes of insight by way of a loving observation of natural phenomena on which the Qur'an so emphatically insists: the alternation of day and night, the course of the winds, the sea's ebb and flow, the visible harmony of stellar orbits, the growth of a new leaf on a tree, the many-sided, ingenious formation of human and animal bodies, the amazing creation of a new living entity through the mating of male and female, the gradual development of the embryo in its mother's body, the immense creative abilities of the human mind, and the freedom of *choice* which reason youchsafes to it. And it is *reason*, in particular, which is pointed out in countless Qur'anic statements and admonitions as the proper way that may lead us to a cognition of what is true and, hence, to faith. And so we are incessantly called upon to make the best possible use of our intellectual capacities, to think, to observe God's visible creation and to meditate upon the invisible one: and, finally, to endeavour to comprehend our own motivations as well as those of our fellow-beings. The whole of the Islamic doctrine tells us, as it were, "Think—and your reason will guide you to faith", instead of assuring us, as some other religions do, "Gain faith—and through your faith you will arrive at a comprehension of the truth". This difference of approach arises from the fact that the spiritual truths of which the

Qur'an speaks have nothing in common with the mysteries and highly involved and often incomprehensible dogmas underlying so many other religions: on the contrary, the Qur'anic teaching is always open to the human mind, irrespective of whether one approaches it through systematic reasoning or through intuition. It goes without saying that the latter is often associated with *emotion*, which frequently manifests itself legitimately—in art and poetry. However, we are indirectly warned by the Qur'an not to allow emotion to become a kind of sentimental "crutch" in our search after religious cognition: for, in order not to be self-deceptive, emotion must be a *result* of cognition and not be considered a way to it.

5

(Q) *Can the "other reality" be known by way of mystical experiences? Or can such a knowledge be attained through meditation? Is it conceivable that man's delving into the depths of his own Self may reveal to him much more than a mere understanding of the psychological factors responsible for the shaping of his personality and his character?*

(A) The Qur'an makes it clear that our comprehension of reality can certainly be deepened and widened by what we describe as "mystical experience": in other words, through an intuitive, spiritual contact with the Divine and, hence, with those truths which are neither open to our self-perception nor can be fully grasped by analytical thinking. In this respect there is hardly any difference between the views of Islam and those of other great religions: all of them appear to be unanimous about the possibility of mystical spiritual experiences and cognitions. Seeing, however, that in every single instance such a possibility depends on the particular capabilities of the individual concerned as well as on the extremely variable factors responsible for his psychological "preparation", the teaching of Islam is very reticent as regards the methods by which a spiritual contact with the Absolute could be brought about and maintained. On one point only does Islam provide us with an explicit, albeit negative statement: it forbids all manner of ascetic self-mortification and world-renunciation, and denies the possibility of such practices bringing man closer to God. "There is no monastic world-renunciation (*rabbāniyyah*) in Islam", the Prophet Muhammad taught us, denying thereby all spiritual virtue to voluntary celibacy; and all schools of Islamic thought regard this teaching as an inviolable principle of faith: for in the Islamic world-view all life—spiritual as well

as physical, intellectual as well as sensual—is God-willed and, therefore, essentially positive; and in the framework of such a world-view, every act of self-mortification is synonymous with a denial of God's gift and thus, by implication, of His plan of creation.

6

(Q) *Can the "other reality" be described by means of the categories and concepts of "our" reality? Does the concept of "God" really imply a "Being" in a sense similar to our definition of "person", or is it only a cypher for something that is beyond all description? Which of the religious statements are to be understood literally, and which must be regarded as metaphorical, allegorical, symbolic or mythical?*

(A) Since those aspects or sectors of reality which are beyond human perception are *eo ipso* outside all human experience, it follows that they cannot be circumscribed by categories and concepts resulting from human experience. For this reason the Qur'an states explicitly in *surah* 3:7: "In this [divine writ] are messages that are clear in and by themselves (*āyāt muhkamāt*) as well as others that are allegorical (*mutashābihāt*)." On close study of the Qur'an it becomes obvious that all of its teachings and statements relating to man's ethical, moral and social behaviour belong to the category of "messages that are clear in and by themselves", whereas all references to those aspects of reality which lie beyond the reach of human perception and imagination and are, therefore, closed to man's cognitive experience, are of necessity expressed in an allegorical manner and must be understood by us in this sense. To this latter category belong, for instance, all references to God and His "attributes", the nature of the beings or powers described as "angels", man's life after death, the Day of Judgment, Paradise and Hell, and so on. However, it seems to me that the above-quoted Qur'anic statement cannot be properly understood unless one arrives at a comprehension of the nature and function of "allegory" as such. A true allegory—in contrast to a mere pictorial paraphrase of thoughts or ideas which could be equally well or perhaps even better expressed in direct terms—is invariably meant to convey in a figurative manner something which, because of its many-layered complexity, can never be expressed in the form of a direct statement and can, therefore, be grasped only intuitively: that is to say, only as a metaphorical image and never as a series of detailed propositions. This characteristic of a true allegory holds good, in particular, of the Islamic concept of God who—as the

Qur'an says—is “sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition” (*surah* 6:100). It is precisely for this reason that God can never be circumscribed and limited, as it were, by the concept of “person” in the humanly-semantic sense of this term. In order to express this impossibility, God speaks of Himself in the Qur'an—often in one and the same sentence—as “I”, “We” and “He”, while the tenses of the respective verbs constantly vary between present, past and future. In view of the high precision so characteristic of the Arabic language—and especially the language of the Qur'an—this flowing-together of the personal pronouns and tenses acquires an extraordinary significance: it implies a powerful, indirect statement that God exists in absolute infinity and timelessness and can never be imagined, described or even conceptually circumscribed.

7

(Q) *Is man a product of the natural development of all living beings as such, different from the animal world only in the sense in which animals are different from plants, or does he belong to a category which may be described as “supra-nature”?*

(A) According to the linguistic definition provided by the Arabic language—and therefore also by the Islamic doctrine, which is expressed in that language—man is an “animal” in the sense of organically belonging to that group of living beings which are endowed with the faculties of sensation, perception and movement, as well as in the sense of being dependent on physiological needs and functions more or less resembling those of other animal beings. But there is one element which differentiates man basically from all other animals: his *rational consciousness*—that is, his ability to form concepts and to bring them together in countless combinations by means of mental processes which can be directed and guided by his will. This uniqueness of human nature is brought out with great clarity in the Qur'anic parable (appearing in the second *surah*) of Adam and the angels: and particularly so because it is obvious from the context that the name “Adam” circumscribes mankind as a whole. In that parable God proves to the angels that Adam is in one respect at least superior to them by virtue of his ability to “give names” to all things, whereas the angels cannot do this. All Arabic philologists agree in that the term “name” (*ism*) linguistically denotes “an expression which is meant to convey the knowledge of any object, concrete or abstract, by circumscribing its substance or its characteristics in such a

way as to differentiate it from other objects": in brief, *ism* is here synonymous with "concept". Consequently, the ability to "give names to things" is a metaphor for man's inborn faculty of logical definition and conceptual thinking. And it is this faculty alone which enables man—in contrast to all other living beings—to visualise *a priori* the consequences of his own activity and, thus, in every situation to arrive at a conscious choice between the various possibilities open to him regarding an action or an attitude. This freedom of choice presupposes, of course, a certain measure of free will—that is, a relative independence of purely animal instincts and urges—and therefore also *moral responsibility*. It is in these twin basic, natural factors of his existence that man's uniqueness and true nature becomes fully apparent.

8

(Q) *Is that which we regard as man's "soul" an entity separate or separable from his body, or is all that we circumscribe by this term but a function and expression of specific physiological processes?*

(A) The Qur'an never refers to man's "soul" in the sense of an entity separate from his biological existence. The Arabic word *nafs*, often (and inadequately) translated as "soul" or "spirit", denotes not only the life-essence active in all sensate beings, but also the *individual identity* of every such being. With reference to man, this term usually signifies a "person" or a "self" in the sense of the integral unity of being which we describe as the "human personality": in other words, the many-sided combination of the concrete, physical organism together with its mental qualities, its character, temperament, and so forth, *plus* that indefinable "something" which endows the body with life, and which is sometimes referred to in the Qur'an as *rūh* as well (although in the Qur'anic usage this latter term is most often synonymous not so much with "spirit" as with "inspiration" and, more particularly, "divine inspiration"). But whichever term we use, the inner relationship between this life-principle and the human or animal body is beyond the reach of our perception. With all this, however, it must be noted that Islam does not envisage any factual or potential *conflict* between man's body and soul, inasmuch as it is only through an inter-action of these two elements that the human personality comes into being and persists.

9

(Q) *Is the human personality immortal, or does its supposed continuity after*

death consist only in a further development, on a new stage, of the elements and processes responsible for man's existence? Is it possible to answer the question as to whether the individual human being has already existed, in whatever form it may have been, before his birth, and, accordingly, how we are to understand his continued existence after bodily death?

(A) Nowhere in the Qur'an do we find any allusion to man's "immortality". God alone is immortal and eternal, whereas all His creation is, in accordance with His Will, but transitory, bound to pass away sooner or later. None the less, the Qur'an speaks again and again of a *continuation* of life after death—that is, of the fact that the death of the body is not an end of human existence but, rather, the beginning of a new stage of indeterminate duration. This new beginning is described in the Qur'an as "resurrection"—namely, a resurrection of the *entire* human "personality" in the sense alluded to in my answer to the preceding question. It is, of course, impossible for us to state or even to imagine with what kind of organism that resurrected personality will be endowed. All Qur'anic references to our life after death are expressed in allegories: this is unavoidable for the simple reason that they are conveyed to us by means of a human language and are, therefore, formulated on the basis of concepts arising from human experiences gained in this, our present, life. However, *one* aspect of our life after what is called "death" is constantly, and with great stress, referred to in the Qur'an: the uninterrupted continuation of *individual consciousness*. In this respect there is not the least break between man's existence before and after bodily death. However much our biological organism may change on resurrection (and quite independently of the question as to whether at that point there will be anything like a "biological organism" in the sense of our present experiences), the Qur'an declares repeatedly that every one of us is destined to continue as a *person* and to carry over his consciousness—and, thus, the moral responsibility for his past actions as well—into the new form of existence. This continuation of consciousness will at that stage be accompanied by an immense widening of our faculty of perception and, hence, will result in a great intensification of our feeling of responsibility for all that we did before death. In this context, all Qur'anic statements about man's happiness or suffering in the new phase of his life—symbolised as Paradise and Hell—gain a meaning which goes far beyond and above the conventional concepts of "reward" or "punishment": namely, man's condition after resurrection reveals itself as the unavoidable *consequence* of

his right or wrong actions and attitudes during the life-phase preceding death—an organic, progressive development, albeit on an incomparably higher level, of his past existence. As to whether at this new stage of life still further goals may possibly be set to human development is a question which we can answer only after having gained new spiritual insights on resurrection.

10

(Q) *Wherein is to be sought man's salvation? In the highest possible development and perfection of his natural predisposition as well as in the best possible fulfilment of the tasks morally enjoined upon him by his time and environment, or in a concentration on such of his abilities and virtues as may cause him to come into contact with the "other reality" and prepare him for it? Is it predominantly important that one should always endeavour to find out how other religions define man's way to salvation, or is it more important to behave throughout one's life in accordance with the ethical demands of his own religion alone?*

(A) Before answering the above question, I may mention two fundamental Islamic principles connected with the problem of "salvation". Firstly, the concept of "original sin" in the Christian sense is entirely alien to Islam and is, moreover, categorically rejected by its teachings: for, man is accountable only for his own behaviour and not for the sins of his forebears—or, in the oft-repeated words of the Qur'an: "No human being is called upon to bear another's burden" (*surah* 6:164; cf. also 17:15, 35:18, 39:7 and 53:38). For this reason man's "salvation" cannot possibly depend on "vicarious atonement"—as is the case in Christianity—in order to free himself from as allegedly "inherited" moral taint. Secondly, Islam denies explicitly the existence of an inborn conflict between body and spirit—a conflict which in the Christian doctrine is held to be at the root of the so-called "original sin"—but regards those two aspects of the human personality as God-willed and, therefore, equally positive, inseparable elements of man's nature. Thus, his "salvation" does not presuppose a renunciation or rejection of the legitimate urges of the body but, rather, their submission to the demands of the spirit and the dictates of conscience.

As soon as we consider these two premisses—the rejection of the principle of "original sin" and the denial of an inborn conflict between body and spirit—we realise that in Islam the concept of "salvation" can have only *one* meaning: a fusion of spirit and flesh,

thought and action, inclination and actual behaviour into a harmonious unity of being distinguished by what we describe as "moral equity" (*'adl*) or "righteousness" (*ma'ruf*)—namely, man's righteousness before God and himself (consisting in the endeavour to surrender his own self entirely to the revealed Will of God and fully to develop his own God-given, positive qualities); and righteousness towards one's fellow-men (expressed in a constant endeavour to help them in their moral development, to safeguard their rights, and to work for a steady improvement of their social conditions). He or she who fulfils these demands attains to salvation in the Islamic sense. For thus it is that Islam does not attribute any essential value to faith alone unless it leads to, and is accompanied by, righteous *actions* as well. It follows, therefore, that it is the innermost purpose of the Qur'anic call to faith to enable man to live physically and spiritually as well as individually and socially in a morally equitable manner. In other words, a cognition of religious truths is in Islam not an end in itself but rather a way to what is ethically good and positive in this life and, consequently, to happiness in the life to come.

11

(Q) *What significance have suffering and happiness for man's spiritual improvement? Should he endeavour to achieve a happy life for himself and for others, patiently accepting conflicts and sufferings which are unavoidable owing to the intrinsic imperfection of the human condition—or should he, in order to test and purify his own self, if not aim at deliberately creating situations which are bound to cause suffering, at least not to try to prevent them or, if they already exist, not to try to do away with them?*

(A) If we bear in mind that the term "Islam" literally denotes "self-surrender", namely, one's self-surrender to God, we are bound to realise that in the Islamic world-view both happiness and suffering must have a direct bearing on the problem of man's ethical development. To accept happiness with gratitude as an unexpected gift from God and not as a kind of "reward" for our presumed righteousness, as well as to do our best to make our fellow-humans share in this our happiness; and to bear all suffering without complaint as something God-willed, as well as to do our best to spare others a similar suffering: in these two demands the ethical outlook of Islam reveals itself most distinctly. Man has undoubtedly a moral right to aim at happiness—but never at the expense of others; and he has the moral duty to strive, in accordance

with his best ability, for a removal of the conflicts and an alleviation of the suffering to which mankind is always exposed because of its weaknesses and imperfections as well as because of natural circumstances beyond all human control. This moral duty arises from the Qur'anic doctrine that both our individual and social life are always capable of improvement, providing that we endeavour to attune our behaviour to the positive faculties which God has bestowed on our minds and our bodies: and this is the reason why Islam so emphatically rejects all self-mortification and world-renunciation, and why it so sharply condemns all passivity in the face of other people's suffering.

In brief, whenever it cannot be avoided, suffering must be borne with patience; and whenever it becomes absolutely necessary that an individual should suffer for the sake of the community, he must willingly take this suffering upon himself: but never is he supposed or allowed to *seek out* suffering for the sake of mere suffering.

12

(Q) *Does the history of mankind show any real development in the sense of progress? Can we observe any growth in humanity and wisdom side by side with scientific and technological progress?*

(A) As a study of history shows us—and as the Qur'an clearly points out—mankind does not display any *collective* progress in the realm of ethical wisdom—for the simple reason that “mankind” is but a multiplication of individual beings and not a spiritual entity as such. All social progress is strictly confined to the sphere of empirical knowledge. It is obvious that the sum-total of mankind's collective, empirically achieved knowledge—expressed in science, technology and organisation—is steadily growing because its elements are easily communicable and can, therefore, be accumulated in the thinking, and reproduced in the doing, of an unlimited number of individuals. The situation is, however, entirely different with regard to progress in the spiritual and ethical sense of these terms: such a progress always depends on the feeling and the will of each individual, and its elements can neither be directly transmitted by one person to another nor accumulated in such a way as to result in mankind's collective “possession”. We can, of course, individually benefit by the spiritual experiences of other individuals if and when these experiences are communicated to us: and this, in fact, is the reason why most of the sacred scriptures, including the Qur'an, so often refer to the spiritual

insights of those extraordinary personalities described as "prophets" but one should never forget that such a possibility of one individual's deriving a spiritual benefit from another person's experiences consists solely in the *influence* which the latter may have on the former and not in a direct *transference* of those experiences. In other words, the thoughts or feelings expressed by God-elected men like Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Muhammad can certainly act as a powerful impulse on our own feelings and attitudes, but cannot automatically, as it were, bring forth similar feelings or attitudes in ourselves. And since the spiritual experiences of one person can never be transferred to another person, they cannot be collectively utilised and—as is the case with elements of empirical knowledge—in the course of time augmented and improved: they can but serve as a means of *guidance* for other individuals. And thus it is that we can speak of spiritual and ethical progress always only with reference to individual human beings, and never to "mankind" as a whole.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF RELIGIONS TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER

13

(Q) *Do the fundamental doctrines of all religions contain truths? Are some religions more or less true, or can only one be true whereas all the others are false? Is there a difference between "religion" and "faith"?*

(A) The historical continuation of and inner connection between the various forms and phases of divine revelation is one of the most important themes in Islamic doctrine. According to the Qur'an, God has in the course of time brought forth prophets from within every single community or cultural entity—messengers who preached one and the same basic truth: namely, that there is only One God, in whose divinity no other being has any, even the most insignificant, share; and that man is responsible to Him for all his actions and conscious endeavours. Many of those prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an by name; but we are also told that besides these there have been countless others as well. Among those great spiritual guides whose names are given in the Qur'an, all the Biblical prophets—foremost among them Abraham, Moses and Jesus—are spoken of side by side with the Prophet Muhammad. The essence of their teachings was always identical; and so it can be said that all of them proclaimed one and the same faith.

However, God tells us in the Qur'an: "For every one of you [i.e., for every one of your communities] have We appointed a [different] divine law and an open road" (*surah* 5:48).

The meaning of this statement is this: Although the eternal truths preached by all of God's messengers have always been the same, their messages differed in respect of the body of *laws* ordained through each of them, leaving to every community a free choice ("an open road") as regards its way of life—and this in view of the varying exigencies of time and of the stage of social development characterising each of those communities or civilisations. Finally, however, mankind as such reached a stage of intellectual preparation which enabled it to comprehend and to accept a universal system of divine laws which could be valid for *all* times and under *all* circumstances: and this, combined with the undeniable fact that none of the earlier sacred scriptures has remained free of considerable and often deliberate alterations, was the reason for the revelation of the Qur'an. Because of the universal, timeless applicability of its teachings the Qur'an represents the summit of all divine revelation and, thus, the most perfect way to man's spiritual and social fulfilment; and because the text of the divine message promulgated through Muhammad has never been and never will be altered, he is the last or, as the Qur'an describes him, the "seal" of all prophets. This uniqueness of the Qur'an and of the person who proclaimed it does not, however, contradict the fact that certain eternal verities *do* endure in earlier revealed religions and that, consequently, their sincere followers can be regarded as "righteous" in the Qur'anic sense of this term as well—provided that they believe in God's transcendental oneness and uniqueness, are fully conscious of their responsibility to Him, and really live in accordance with these tenets. To make this point absolutely clear, the Qur'an repeatedly says:

"Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (*surah* 2:62).

14

- (Q) *Does the cognition of the verity of a religion depend on the intellectual or moral maturity of an individual as such? Is a religious comprehension of*

world and life always dependent on the particular character, the particular intelligence and the particular degree of consciousness of the person concerned, possibly in the same manner in which various popular religions are but mirrors of the characterand the situation of the society in which they have come into being? Or is there a religion which could be regarded as valid and true for all people, at all times?

(A) As I have pointed out in my answer to the question preceding this one, the Qur'an recognises the belief in God's transcendental oneness and uniqueness as the only true and in the religious sense acceptable faith; and the same Qur'an stresses again and again that a cognition of this fundamental truth is open to every mature, mentally sound human being. Now it goes without saying that the way and manner in which an intellectually simple person conceives God's Being must differ in many respects from the conception of a philosopher. But provided that both are equally sincere, the difference between their conceptions consists, essentially, only in a difference between two degrees of consciousness and knowledge and has nothing to do with the question as to whether the *faith* of either of these two persons is genuine and complete. The believing philosopher is, of course, in a position to support his intellectual perception of God's oneness and almightiness by his far-reaching knowledge of natural occurrences, of history and of human psychology, of the way in which human societies are formed, and so on; but the same holds good, on his own level, of the "simple", uneducated believer, even though he may not have a comparable intellectual apparatus at his disposal: for, although his world-view is inevitably narrower than that of a philosopher, it need not be less "true" in the subjective sense of this term. And so it can be said that the faith both of a philosopher and of an entirely uneducated person attains to completeness and validity as soon as either of them is able to connect his particular perception of reality with his cognition of the existence of the One God, in whose divinity none and nothing has a share. Conversely, without such a cognition, no faith—whatever its formulation—can be considered true in the Qur'anic sense of this word.

15

(Q) *If there is a religion which may be said to contain and express the ultimate truth, how does it happen that not all human beings accept it as soon as they become acquainted with it?*

(A) Although there are many religions, there exists only *one* religious truth: the existence of the One and Only God, who again and again reveals His Being to us in His perceptible creation and, more explicitly, through the instrumentality of His chosen messengers, the prophets. The fact that not all human beings can be or are willing to accept this truth is due to various causes. One of them is the unwillingness of so many people to surrender themselves to the idea of the Absolute and, hence, to submit their own lives to ethical and moral imperatives which often conflict with what such people regard as directly “advantageous” to their own material or social interests. Another, more prevalent cause may be found in certain influences to which these people were exposed from their very childhood: for instance, in early “inherited” religious doctrines which had long ago strayed from the fundamental truth of God’s oneness and uniqueness and now force their adherents to grope about in a labyrinth of enigmatic dogmas and mysteries which are, by their very nature, beyond man’s intellectual grasp and cannot, therefore, always satisfy a searching mind. None-the less, such religious teachings exert a kind of nostalgic attraction on people who had grown up under their influence and have never encountered another religious proposition—so much so that they cannot now approach *any* religious problem independently of what they had come to regard as *the* truth during their childhood and adolescence. And, finally, just as there are people who have no “ear” for music, there are such as have never experienced any urge to search after spiritual truths, and have always lost themselves in mere material, “practical” concerns; and of such people the Qur’an says:

“The parable of those who are bent on denying the truth is that of the beast which hears the shepherd’s cry, and hears in it nothing but the sound of a voice and a call.* Deaf are they, and dumb, and blind: for they do not use their reason” (*surah* 2:171).

16

(Q) *How can we explain the rise, within every single religion, of various, often widely divergent tendencies and schools of thought? What significance has the existence of these different tendencies with regard to the particular religion’s claim to represent the ultimate truth?*

* For a literal translation of the highly elliptic phrase freely rendered above, see Muhammad Asad: *The Message of the Qur’an*, p. 35, note 138.

(A) Different individuals frequently approach one and the same problem in a different manner and, consequently, arrive at more or less divergent answers. This, however, does not in the least invalidate a religion's claim to represent the truth—for the simple reason that every truth has many facets. The Qur'an says: "God guides [lit., "has guided"] the believers unto the truth about which, *by His leave*, they had disagreed" (*surat* 2:213); and the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of God's] grace."

The above-quoted Qur'anic statement with its explicit reference to "God's leave" or "permission", as well as the—obviously explanatory—saying of the Prophet, stress the fact that the diversity evident in all human thought-processes is an entirely natural and unavoidable phenomenon, and that without such a diversity man's intellectual progress would be inconceivable. For this reason alone, if for no other, there is no ideological opening in Islam for the concept of a "church" in the sense of an institutionalised system of "authoritative" interpretations of this or that point of doctrine; and, consequently, in all the history of Islam there has never been a moment when individual thinking about and re-thinking of theological problems has ceased to be a living issue for truly creative scholars. And so it has come about that there are a number of schools of thought in Islam; but provided that such "schools" or tendencies are based *solely* on the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet, they are "legitimate" from the doctrinal point of view and do not—cannot—contradict one another in any fundamental proposition of the Faith.

17

(Q) *Can man's religious predisposition and spiritual destiny be realised solely through his acceptance of one or another of the historic religions, or can he find an individual answer to religious problems independently of any of the existing religions? And is an intellectual comprehension of religious problems a pre-condition for the attainment to truth faith?*

(A) In a certain sense, this question can be answered by the meaning of the very term *Islam*. Literally, this word denotes "self-surrender" and, in the deeper sense, "man's self-surrender to God". As soon as we become fully aware that God exists, and thereupon surrender ourselves to Him both in our faith and in our attitudes, we fulfil the meaning of our life.

Certain, exceptionally-gifted individuals are sometimes able to attain to such a spiritual and intellectual fulfilment through personal intuition alone; the far greater majority of human beings, however, cannot achieve this without external help: and such a help is offered to them in the shape of divine *revelation*—the revelation granted to God’s prophets. This twofold fact of intuition and revelation is impressively illustrated in the famous allegorical story *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān* (“The Living, son of The Wide-Awake”) composed in the 12th century by the Arab philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl. In his search for spiritual perfection, the fictional narrator of that romantic story lands on an apparently uninhabited island and encounters a man who has lived there alone since his earliest childhood, cut off from all intercourse with other human beings. This man—Ḥayy bin Yaqzān—has gradually, in intimate contact with nature and with no other aid than the inborn, uncorrupted powers of his intellect, arrived at the highest level of thinking and perception, and thus achieved an insight into God’s existence. He has passed through all degrees of intuitive cognition and has now reached a stage where the universe is clearly understandable to him as an evidence of God’s creativeness; and in the end he finds that his own philosophy—arrived at without prophets or direct divine revelation—is in all its essentials identical with that Islam which his new-found friend, the narrator, professes. Some time later, after his return to inhabited regions and thus to human society, Ḥayy bin Yaqzān realises that his own way of life and thought was quite exceptional, and that for the overwhelming majority of human beings the guidance offered by the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad is *the* way to the truth: for, in the life of most people, faith can only be awakened and maintained by definite divine statements and laws, by moral admonition, and by the allegory of reward and punishment in the life to come. But whatever the way, the goal is—and must always remain—the same: man’s self-surrender to God.

18

(Q) *Should a religious community always aim at maintaining its social and political privileges, or should it forgo all claim to privileges as such and seek, instead, to obtain the free assent of each individual, confining itself to an influence corresponding to the number of true believers?*

(A) The Qur’an says: “There shall be no coercion in matters of faith” (*surah* 2:256). This emphatic postulate implies, firstly, that the acceptance of Islam by an individual must be based on that individual’s free choice;

secondly, all Islamic jurists (*fuqahā*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void and that, moreover, any *attempt* at forcing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin (which, by the way, disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the non-believers the alternative of “conversion or the sword”); and, thirdly, that the Muslim community (*ummah*) has no right whatsoever to undermine either the social structure or the religious and cultural freedom of the non-Muslim minorities living in its midst, or to deprive them of their civic rights. These principles have been most clearly impressed by the Prophet Muhammad upon his followers, with the result that in the course of time there has grown up a special branch of Islamic jurisprudence devoted to the protection of the rights of non-Muslim minorities. However, since in Islam there is no separation between “mundane” and “religious” spheres of life, Islam claims for itself the right to provide the basis of the legal system in all countries which are exclusively, or in a great majority, inhabited by Muslims—and this, of course, on the premises that the legal system of Islam comprises *eo ipso* all necessary provisions for the protection of non-Muslim citizens.

19

(Q) *Is it conceivable that in time we could arrive not merely at a dialogue and a mutual analysis of the various religious systems, but rather at an approximation and ultimate fusion of all those systems— or will such an approximation lead to the victory of one particular religion and the disappearance of all the others? What are the indications in this respect in the context of today’s situation?*

(A) From the Islamic point of view, a dialogue between the monotheistic religions is always most desirable inasmuch as it might lead to a mutual understanding—and, therefore, approximation—on the basis of those principles of faith which are common to all of us. The Qur’an is quite explicit on this point:

“Say: ‘O followers of [earlier] revelations (*ahl al-kitāb*): Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings [lit., ‘one another’] for our lords beside God’ ” (*surah* 3:64).

A doctrinal agreement on this basis would, as we Muslims see it, fulfil the essential demand of all true faith, and thus enable mankind better to resist the forces of utter materialism which—irrespective of whether they come from the East or the West—threaten to destroy man's spirit and, ultimately, the entire world. Seeing that the Qur'an forbids us in severe terms to show the least disrespect to the person or the memory of any of the earlier prophets, we Muslims naturally expect our non-Muslim friends to adopt a similar attitude with regard to our Prophet Muhammad; and if they do not find it possible to recognise him as a prophet (as we recognise the prophethood of Abraham, Moses and Jesus and all the other sacred personalities of the Bible), they should at least treat his name with all the respect which is obviously due to a human being of so deep a God-consciousness and so total a self-surrender to God as our Prophet undoubtedly was. As soon as this common-sense demand of ours is fulfilled, the three great monotheistic religions will automatically come much closer to one another. It must, however, always be borne in mind that we Muslims can never lose sight of the fundamental principle of Islam—the doctrine that God is one and unique, that none has a share in His divinity, and that Muhammad was called upon by Him to proclaim this truth to all the world.

III. RELIGION AND HUMANITARIANISM

20

(Q) *What is the relationship between a person's profession of a religious faith and his behaviour in the realm of ethics? Can one be truly humane only if one adheres to a particular religion, or is man's ability to be humanitarian quite independent of any religious notions and perceptions?*

(A) In my opinion, the innermost purpose of every higher religion consists in guiding man towards a "good life" in the ethical sense of this phrase: hence, faith and ethics are invariably—and most closely—connected. We must, however, always bear in mind that the core of what we describe as a "religious experience" is, primarily, an intuitive conviction that everything which exists or is about to come into existence is the result of *one* conscious, creative, all-embracing Will; and, secondly, the believer's endeavour to attain to a spiritual and intellectual harmony with the demands of that Will. It is only on the basis of such a conviction and such an endeavour that man becomes able to conceive

of standards of moral and ethical valuations independent of all time-bound social changes: in other words, to differentiate between Good and Evil in the permanent sense of these terms. Whenever we cease to believe that an absolute, consciously-planning Will is active within every manifestation, perceivable or imperceivable, of the universe as a whole, we lose all logical reason for the assumption that any of our endeavours and actions could be *per se*, in its essence, right or wrong, moral or immoral. Thus, in the absence of such a faith, the very concept of ethics and morality loses in time all its meaning, and our views as to the righteousness or unrighteousness of human actions dissolve gradually into a series of vague, pragmatic, habit-conditioned rules of behaviour—rules which become more and more dependent on the question as to whether this or that action of the person concerned—or of the social group to which that person belongs—is useful or harmful from a *practical* point of view. And so, Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, are imperceptibly transformed into purely *relative* concepts which may always be interpreted in an arbitrary manner according to a person's or a society's presumed needs; as a matter of fact, such "expedient" concepts *must* be constantly re-interpreted in accordance with the time-conditioned changes—social, economic and technological—to which all human life is subject.

From whatever point of view we consider this problem, we find that in all historic periods *religion* was the only source of ethics and morality. No alternative source has until this day been discovered; and neither do we have the least indication that "non-religious" ethics will ever become conceivable. One could, of course, object to this statement by pointing out that a good many agnostics and atheists are undoubtedly imbued with deep moral convictions and that, consequently, one *can* have such convictions without having any religious faith. However, those who argue on these lines usually overlook the psychological fact that the moral concepts and valuations held by an individual human being are not simply the result of his own thinking and feeling but are invariably—and to a very great extent—rooted in thoughts and moral valuations which he has inherited from earlier generations through the medium of his cultural environment. In logical continuation of this finding one may safely assert that the positive ethical and moral convictions of our atheistic contemporaries are in reality (and in a very high degree) an unconscious heritage derived from those innumerable forebears whose world-view was based on their faith in the existence of a planning Divine Will: in short, a *religious* faith. How long—that is,

through how many subsequent generations— this heritage can remain alive without any further religious nourishment is obviously a question which only the future can answer.

21

(Q) *Should the adherents of a religious faith, in order to live fully in accordance with its demands, keep themselves as much as possible apart from those professing another faith, or are there spheres of life in which all people, regardless of their various convictions, should dwell together and cooperate? Is living together with non-believers or adherents of another faith a necessary evil for a true believer, or is it a humane task independent of all differences in matters of faith?*

(A) The Muslims do not believe that it is necessary or even desirable to live apart from non-Muslims. They do believe that they are duty-bound to communicate and explain the tenets of their faith to all people who are as yet unaware of what it portends; and in order to be able to do this, they obviously *must* live in steady contact with non-Muslims. Moreover, the Qur'an says:

“If God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single [religious] community; but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of whatever [revelation] He had vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works!” (*surah* 5:48).

Consequently, living together and working together with adherents of other faiths or even people without any faith is for a Muslim not a “necessary evil” but, rather, an ethical demand.

22

(Q) *Are there ethical values which may be considered uniformly valid and binding for all nations and individuals of our time, or at least for all nations and individuals belonging to the civilised world? Do, for instance, the basic human rights postulated in the U.N. Charter and in the constitutions of the Occidental countries possess the character of such uniformly-binding norms? What contribution do the various religious communities offer towards the furthering and the maintenance of those commonly-held values?*

(A) There is no doubt that many ethical values—like truthfulness, kindness, justice and so forth—are regarded by most communities and individuals as morally valid and generally binding; in this respect there hardly exists any difference of opinion among the higher religions. The U.N. Charter has evidently been derived from such generally valid norms and should, therefore, be cherished and continuously improved upon by all people of good will, whatever be their religious convictions.

23

(Q) *Is there a danger that the unification of moral values and ethical concepts, spoken of in the preceding question and answer, might sooner or later lead to a unification of the various religions as such?*

(A) As I have already stated, a mutual approximation of the various religious concepts and ideas appears to us Muslims as very desirable—provided, always, that such an approximation is based on a general affirmation of a belief in God's oneness and uniqueness—a belief which for us represents the *only possible* and acceptable norm of faith. Hence, we do not regard the possibility of such a development with apprehension but, on the contrary, welcome it with hope and expectation. However, one must not overlook the fact that the present-day tendency towards a unification of all concepts of life and moral values, discernible in almost all parts of the world, is by no means conducive to the goal visualised by us: for this growing tendency towards "unification" is not so much the result of an approximation in the sphere of positive ethical values as, rather, of the ubiquitous, steadily-rising worship of material things and amenities—that is to say, of non-ethical values. In other words, men's ideas and valuations tend to become more and more similar everywhere because most people, all over the world, are increasingly striving after material goals alone, and not because they aim at one and the same spiritual truth. Looked at from this point of view, the growing approximation of men's concepts is, in fact, a danger—and not merely a danger to this or that religion, but to every religious world-view as such.

IV. RELIGION AND SOCIETY

24

(Q) *Is it the duty of the state to safeguard each individual's freedom of conscience*

and faith—or should the state remain secular—that is, completely aloof from all aspects of religious life—and simply delegate the duty of supervision and education in all religious questions to the existing religious communities?

(A) Within the Islamic concept of society there is no room for the concept of a “secular” state for the simple reason that Islam does not admit of any separation between “religious” and “mundane” life-concerns. Consequently, Islam considers it a duty of the state to keep the religious upbringing of its citizens always in view. In the public schools of a country in which all or a great majority of the population are Muslims, religious instruction should be an indispensable, obligatory part of the curriculum for all Muslim pupils; and since the Islamic State is duty-bound to safeguard and protect the cultural concerns of *all* its citizens regardless of their religious affiliation, the same possibilities must be open to non-Muslim communities as well. Now as regards the religious teaching of non-Muslim pupils in public schools, the right and duty of guidance and instruction must be left to the leaders of the communities concerned.

25

(Q) *What role, if any, should theology—and the study of religions in general—play within the concept of the university? Should the university keep itself free from all links with any religious system, or has there, too, the religious education of adherents of a particular faith its legitimate place?*

(A) Since theology (in the widest sense of this term) is most closely connected with the problem of *knowledge* as such, Islam naturally demands that it should be one of the subjects taught at the universities of Muslim countries; and the same holds good of what is described as “comparative religion”—that is, the study of the origins, the development and the inter-relations of the various religious systems. Similar to what I have earlier said about the teaching of religion in public schools, in the universities, too, the principle of the “dominant religion” should generally be applied: in other words, the theology taught at state universities should be based on the religious doctrines professed by the majority of the citizens of the country concerned, with the proviso that all confessional minorities should have the right to establish and to run, within the framework of the university, special institutes devoted to the study of their own religion.

26

(Q) *Do the tenets of a particular religion postulate definite attitudes towards political, social and economic problems—for instance, capitalism, socialism or liberalism—towards democracy, or towards the question of atomic armament, etc.?*

(A) As seen from the Islamic point of view, the answers to many—if not most—political and economic questions depend on time-conditioned factors and circumstances; and since these are extremely variable, none of such answers can remain valid for all times and in all circumstances. This is fully in tune with the Qur'anic teaching that all life, in whatever form, is subject to constant evolution. None the less, Islamic Law offers us certain clearly-defined, unchangeable principles with which our time-bound "answers" must accord in order to be considered Islamic: for instance, the principle of juridical and social justice, the prohibition of any kind of exploitation of man by man, the principle of public consensus and consultation as the basis of state and government, freedom of opinion, the right of ownership of movable and immovable property (with the proviso, however, that the public good stands above all private interests), the state's responsibility for the welfare of all its citizens and, in particular, for the maintenance of all persons who are unable to care for themselves for reasons beyond their control, and so forth. The Muslims are morally obliged to work out, on the basis of such unchangeable principles, practical answers which would be commensurate with the demands of their time and their socio-economic circumstances, and to re-formulate those answers again and again in accordance with the unceasing changes in all human life.

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الاستاذ محمد أسد
مؤلف الكتاب

Asad's sketch, published in the *al-Islam 'ala mustariq al-turuq*, an Arabic translation of his *Islam at the Crossroads*. Translated by 'Umar Farukh, 4th ed., Beirut 1962 (1946).

MUHAMMAD ASAD/M. IKRAM CHAGHATAI

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXCERPTS (From *The Road to Mecca*)

There were those early childhood years in the Polish city of Lwów¹—then in Austrian possession — in a house that was as quiet and dignified as the street² on which it stood... I loved that lovely street with a consciousness far beyond my childish years, and not merely because it was the street of my home: I loved it, I think, because of the air of noble self-possession with which it flowed from the gay centre of that gayest of cities toward the stillness of the woods on the city's margin and the great cemetery that lay hidden in those woods...

And there were the summer months in the country, where my mother's father,³ a wealthy banker, maintained a large estate for his large family's pleasure. A sluggish little stream with willow trees along its banks; barns full of placid cows, a chiaroscuro mysteriously pregnant with the scent of animals and hay and the laughter of the Ruthenian peasant girls who were busy in the evenings with milking; you would drink the foaming warm milk straight from the pails — not because you were thirsty, but because it was exciting to drink something that was still so close to its animal source ...

And there were journeys with my parents to Vienna and Berlin and the Alps and the Bohemian forests and the North Sea and the Baltic: places so distant that they almost seemed to be new worlds. Every time one set out on such a journey, the first whistle of the train engine and the first jolt of the wheels made one's heart stop beating in

¹ Lwów (Lemberg) remained under Habsburg Monarchy up to the First World War (1914-18); an important centre of the Galician Jews.

See Peter Fässler, Thomas Held & Dirk Sawitzki (eds.): *Lemberg...Eine Stadt im Schmittpunkt europäischer Kulturen*. Weimar 1995; Hans Bisanz (ed.): *Lemberg...1772-1918. Wiederbegegnung mit einer Landeshauptstadt der Donaumonarchie. Ausstellungskatalog*. Vienna 1993.

² Name of the street was: Piekarska-Strasse, no. 31 (cf. Windhager, *op. cit.*, p. 40).

³ Mendel Feigenbaum. (see 'Photographs').

anticipation of the wonders that were now to unfold themselves ... And there were playmates, boys and girls, a brother and a sister and many cousins; and glorious Sundays of freedom after the dullness — but not too oppressive a dullness—of weekdays in school: hikes through the countryside, and the first surreptitious meetings with lovely girls of one's own age, and the blush of a strange excitement from which one recovered only after hours and hours.

It was a happy childhood, satisfying even in retrospect. My parents lived in comfortable circumstances; and they lived mostly for their children. My mother's placidity and unruffled quiet may have had something to do with the ease with which in later years I was able to adapt myself to unfamiliar and, on occasion, most adverse conditions; while my father's inner restlessness is probably mirrored in my own...

If I had to describe my father,⁴ I would say that this lovely, slim, middle-sized man of dark complexion and dark, passionate eyes was not quite in tune with his surroundings. In his early youth he had dreamed of devoting himself to science, especially physics, but had never been able to realize this dream and had to content himself with being a barrister. Although quite successful in this profession, in which his keen mind must have found a welcome challenge, he never reconciled himself to it fully; and the air of loneliness that surrounded him may have been caused by an ever-present awareness that his true calling had eluded him.

His father⁵ had been an orthodox rabbi in Czernowitz, capital of the then Austrian province of Bukovina. I still remember him as a graceful old man with very delicate hands and a sensitive face framed in a long, white beard. Side by side with his deep interest in mathematics and astronomy — which he studied in his spare time throughout his life — he was one of the best chess players of the district. This was probably the basis of his longstanding friendship with the Greek-Orthodox archbishop, himself a chess player of note. The two would spend many an evening together over the chessboard and would round off their sessions by discussing the metaphysical propositions of their respective religions. One might have presumed that, with such a bent of

⁴ Dr. Kiwa (also Akiva and Akiba, afterwards Karl) Weiss (2.10.1872, Czernowitz—1944?); captured by Nazis (1942) and deported first to Theresienstadt and then to the concentration camp of Auschwitz (16.5.1944) where he was shot. (see 'Photographs').

⁵ Benjamin Arje Leib Hakohen Weiss (1841, Janow in Galicia—December 1912, Czernowitz). Hermann Sternberg has given the different dates, 1843-1913 (cf. *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Czernowitz*, Tel Aviv 1962, p. 20 (see 'Photographs').

mind, my grandfather would have welcomed his son's — my father's inclination toward science. But apparently he had made up his mind from the very first that his eldest son would continue the rabbinical tradition which went back in the family for several generations, and refused even to consider any other career for my father. In this resolve he may have been strengthened by a disreputable skeleton in the family cupboard: the memory of an uncle of his — that is, a great great-uncle of mine — who had in the most unusual way 'betrayed' the family tradition and even turned away from the religion of his forefathers.

That almost mythical great-great-uncle, whose name was never mentioned aloud, seems to have been brought up in the same strict family tradition. At a very young age he had become a full-fledged rabbi and been married off to a woman whom he apparently did not love. As the rabbinical profession did not bring sufficient remuneration in those days, he supplemented his income by trading in furs, which every year necessitated a journey to Europe's central fur market, Leipzig. One day, when he was about twenty-five years old, he set out by horse cart — it was in the first half of the nineteenth century—on one of these long journeys. In Leipzig he sold his furs as usual; but instead of returning to his home town as usual, he sold the cart and the horse as well, shaved off his beard and sidelocks and, forgetting his unloved wife, went to England. For a time he earned his living by menial work, studying astronomy and mathematics in the evening. Some patron seems to have recognized his mental gifts and enabled him to pursue his studies at Oxford, from where he emerged after a few years as a promising scholar and a convert to Christianity. Shortly after sending a letter of divorce to his Jewish wife, he married a girl from among the 'gentiles'. Not much was known to our family about his later life, except that he achieved considerable distinction as an astronomer and university teacher and ended his days as a knight.

This horrifying example seems to have persuaded my grandfather to take a very stern attitude regarding my father's inclination toward the study of 'gentile' sciences; he had to become a rabbi, and that was that. My father, however, was not prepared to give in so easily. While he studied the Talmud in daytime, he spent part of his nights in studying secretly, without the help of a teacher, the curriculum of a humanistic *gymnasium*. In time he confided in his mother. Although her son's surreptitious studies may have burdened her conscience, her generous nature made her realize that it would be cruel to deprive him of a chance to follow his heart's desire. At the age of twenty-two, after

completing the eight years' course of a *gymnasium* within four years, my father presented himself for the baccalaureate examination and passed it with distinction. With the diploma in hand, he and his mother now dared to break the terrible news to my grandfather. I can imagine the dramatic scene that ensued; but the upshot of it was that my grandfather ultimately relented and agreed that my father should give up his rabbinical studies and attend the university instead. The financial circumstances of the family did not, however, allow him to go in for his beloved study of physics; he had to turn to a more lucrative profession — that of law—and in time became a barrister. Some years later he settled in the city of Lwów in eastern Galicia and married my mother,⁶ one of the four daughters of a rich local banker. There, in the summer⁷ of 1900, I was born as the second of three children.⁸

My father's frustrated desire expressed itself in his wide reading on scientific subjects and perhaps also in his peculiar, though extremely reserved, predilection for his second son—myself—who also seemed to be more interested in things not immediately connected with the making of money and a successful 'career'. Nevertheless, his hopes to make a scientist of me were destined to remain unfulfilled. Although not stupid, I was a very indifferent student. Mathematics and natural sciences were particularly boring to me; I found infinitely more pleasure in reading the stirring historical romances of Sienkiewicz,⁹ the fantasies of Jules Verne,¹⁰ Red Indian stories by James Fenimore Cooper¹¹ and Karl May¹² and, later, the verses of Rilke¹³ and the sonorous cadences of *Also sprach Zarathustra*.¹⁴ The mysteries of gravity and electricity, no less than Latin and Greek grammar, left me entirely cold—with the result that I always

⁶ Amalia (also Mala and Malka) Weiss (7.11.1875, Lemberg—4.10.1919, Vienna).

⁷ Asad was born on 2 July, 1900.

⁸ Asad's elder brother was Dr. Heinrich Weiss (b. 24 or 31 March 1897, Lemberg) and the name of his younger sister was Dr. Rachel (also Hella) Weiss (b. 15.1.1906, Lemberg—20.7.1944 in concentration camp, Stutthof) (see 'Photographs').

⁹ Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916); Polish novelist, Nobel laureate (1905).

¹⁰ Jules Verne (1828-1905), French writer for boys; "Five Weeks in a Balloon."

¹¹ J. F. Cooper (1789-1851), an American novelist.

¹² Karl May vividly portrayed the life of Kurds and Arabian bedouins and Asad was deeply impressed by his vivid descriptions, as reflected in his first book entitled *Unromantisches Orient* (1924). See Windhager, *op. cit.*, p. 140 & f.n. 449.

¹³ Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), Czech-German poet.

¹⁴ Authored by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

got my promotions only by the skin of my teeth. This must have been a keen disappointment to my father, but he may have found some consolation in the fact that my teachers seemed to be very satisfied with my inclination toward literature — both Polish and German — as well as history.

In accordance with our family's tradition, I received, through private tutors at home, a thorough grounding in Hebrew religious lore. This was not due to any pronounced religiosity in my parents. They belonged to a generation which, while paying lip service to one or another of the religious faiths that had shaped the lives of its ancestors, never made the slightest endeavour to conform its practical life or even its ethical thought to those teachings. In such a society the very concept of religion had been degraded to one of two things: the wooden ritual of those who clung by habit — and only by habit — to their religious heritage, or the cynical insouciance of the more 'liberal' ones, who considered religion as an outmoded superstition to which one might, on occasion, outwardly conform but of which one was secretly ashamed, as of something intellectually indefensible. To all appearances, my own parents belonged to the former category; but at times I have a faint suspicion that my father, at least, inclined toward the latter. Nevertheless, in deference to both his father and his father-in-law, he insisted on my spending long hours over the sacred scriptures. Thus, by the age of thirteen, I not only could read Hebrew with great fluency but also spoke it freely and had, in addition, a fair acquaintance with Aramaic (which may possibly account for the ease with which I picked up Arabic in later years). I studied the Old Testament in the original; the *Mishna*¹⁵ and *Gemara*¹⁶ — that is the text and the commentaries of the Talmud — became familiar to me; I could discuss with a good deal of self-assurance the differences between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds; and I immersed myself in the intricacies of Biblical exegesis, called *Targum*,¹⁷ just as if I had been destined for a rabbinical career.

In spite of all this budding religious wisdom, or maybe because of it, I soon developed a supercilious feeling toward many of the premises of the Jewish faith. To be sure, I did not disagree with the teaching of moral righteousness so strongly emphasized throughout the

¹⁵ Ancient codification of the oral law, compiled about 200 B.C. under the authority of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nassi.

¹⁶ Commentary of the "six Orders" of the *Mishna*. The Talmud is constituted of the *Mishna* and the *Gemara*.

¹⁷ Exegetical translation of the Bible in Aramaic.

Jewish scriptures, nor with the sublime God-consciousness of the Hebrew Prophets — but it seemed to me that the God of the Old Testament and the Talmud was unduly concerned with the ritual by means of which His worshippers were supposed to worship Him. It also occurred to me that this God was strangely preoccupied with the destinies of one particular nation, the Hebrews. The very build-up of the Old Testament as a history of the descendants of Abraham tended to make God appear not as the creator and sustainer of all mankind but, rather, as a tribal deity adjusting all creation to the requirements of a 'chosen people': rewarding them with conquests if they were righteous, and making them suffer at the hands of nonbelievers whenever they strayed from the prescribed path. Viewed against these fundamental shortcomings, even the ethical fervour of the later Prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, seemed to be barren of a universal message.

But although the effect of those early studies of mine was the opposite of what had been intended—leading me away from, rather than closer to, the religion of my forefathers—I often think that in later years they helped me to understand the fundamental purpose of religion as such, whatever its form. At that time, however, my disappointment with Judaism did not lead me to a search for spiritual truths in other directions. Under the influence of an agnostic environment, I drifted, like so many boys of my age, into a matter-of-fact rejection of all institutional religions; and since my religion had never meant much more to me than a series of restrictive regulations, I felt none the worse for having drifted away from it. Theological and philosophical ideas did not yet really concern me; what I was looking forward to was not much different from the expectations of most other boys: action, adventure, excitement.¹⁸

Toward the end of 1914, when the Great War was already raging, the first big chance to fulfil my boyish dreams seemed to come within grasp. At the age of fourteen I made my escape from school and joined the Austrian army under a false name. I was very tall for my years and easily passed for eighteen, the minimum age for recruitment. But apparently I did not carry a marshal's baton in my knapsack. After a week or so, my poor father succeeded in tracing me with the help of the police, and I was ignominiously escorted back to Vienna, where my family had settled some time earlier. Nearly four years later I was actually, and legitimately, drafted into the Austrian army; but by then I

¹⁸ See Günter Windhager: *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad. Von Galizien nach Arabien 1900-1927*. Vienna 2003, pp. 48-52.

had ceased to dream of military glory and was searching for other avenues to self-fulfillment. In any case, a few weeks after my induction the revolution broke out, the Austrian Empire collapsed, and the war was over.¹⁹

For about two years after the end of the Great War I studied, in a somewhat desultory fashion, history of art and philosophy at the University of Vienna.²⁰ My heart was not in those studies. A quiet academic career did not attract me. I felt a yearning to come into more intimate grips with life, to enter it without any of those carefully contrived, artificial defences which security-minded people love to build up around themselves; and I wanted to find by myself an approach to the spiritual order of things which, I knew, must exist but which I could not yet discern.

It is not easy to explain in so many words what I meant in those days by a 'spiritual order'; it certainly did not occur to me to conceive of the problem in conventional religious terms or, for that matter, in any precise terms whatsoever. My vagueness, to be fair to myself, was not of my own making. It was the vagueness of an entire generation.

The opening decades of the twentieth century stood in the sign of a spiritual vacuum. All the ethical valuations to which Europe have been accustomed for so many centuries had become amorphous under the terrible impact of what had happened between 1914 and 1918, and no new set of values was yet anywhere in sight. A feeling of brittleness and insecurity was in the air — a presentiment of social and intellectual upheavals that made one doubt whether there could ever again be any permanency in man's thoughts and endeavours. Everything seemed to be flowing in a formless flood, and the spiritual restlessness of youth could nowhere find a foothold. In the absence of any reliable standards of morality, nobody could give us young people satisfactory answers to the many questions that perplexed us. Science said, 'Cognition is everything' — and forgot that cognition without an ethical goal can lead only to chaos. The social reformers, the revolutionaries, the communists

¹⁹ Cf. Windhager, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-65, where the archival information relating to Asad's stay in Vienna, his *gymnasium* and the time he spent there during the Second World War (1914-18) has been given.

²⁰ Whereas Asad's brother, Heinrich, and sister, Rachel, chose medicine and law respectively for their advance study, he took admission in the Faculty of Philosophy (Vienna University) and started studying the history of art and also attended the lectures on physics and chemistry. For detail, see Windhager, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-69.

— all of whom undoubtedly wanted to build a better, happier world— were thinking only in terms of outward, social and economic, circumstances; and to bridge that defect, they had raised their 'materialistic conception of history' to a kind of new, anti-metaphysical metaphysics. The traditionally religious people, on the other hand, knew nothing better than to attribute to their God qualities derived from their own habits of thought, which had long since become rigid and meaningless: and when we young people saw that these alleged divine qualities often stood in sharp contrast with what was happening in the world around us, we told ourselves: 'The moving forces of destiny are evidently different from the qualities which are ascribed to God; therefore — there is no God.' And it occurred to only very few of us that the cause of all this confusion might lie perhaps in the arbitrariness of the self-righteous guardians of faith who claimed to have the right to 'define' God and, by clothing Him with their own garments, separated Him from man and his destiny.

In the individual, this ethical lability could lead either to complete moral chaos and cynicism or, alternatively, to a search for a creative, personal approach to what might constitute the good life.

This instinctive realization may have been, indirectly, the reason for my choice of history of art as my main subject at the university. It was the true function of art, I suspected, to evoke a vision of the coherent, unifying pattern that must underlie the fragmentary picture of happenings which our consciousness reveals to us and which, it seemed to me, could be only inadequately formulated through conceptual thought. However, the courses which I attended did not satisfy me. My professors—some of them, like Strzygowski²¹ and Dvorak,²² outstanding in their particular fields of study — appeared to be more concerned with discovering the aesthetic laws that govern artistic creation than with baring its innermost spiritual impulses: in other words, their approach to art was, to my mind, too narrowly confined to the question of the *forms* in which it expressed itself.

The conclusions of psychoanalysis, to which I was introduced in those days of youthful perplexity, left me equally, if for somewhat different reasons, unsatisfied. No doubt, psychoanalysis was at that time an intellectual revolution of the first magnitude, and one felt in one's bones that this flinging-open of new, hitherto barred doors of cognition

²¹ Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941), the founder of the first Institute of the History of Art in Vienna.

²² Max Dvořák (1874-1921), a reputed art historian.

was bound to affect deeply — and perhaps change entirely — man's thinking about himself and his society. The discovery of the role which unconscious urges play in the formation of the human personality opened, beyond any question, avenues to a more penetrating self-understanding than had been offered to us by the psychological theories of earlier times. All this I was ready to concede. Indeed, the stimulus of Freudian²³ ideas was as intoxicating to my young mind as potent wine, and many were the evenings I spent in Vienna's cafés²⁴ listening to exciting discussions between some of the early pioneers of psychoanalysis, such as Alfred Adler,²⁵ Hermann Steckl²⁶ and Otto Gross.²⁷ But while I certainly did not dispute the validity of its analytical principles, I was disturbed by the intellectual arrogance of the new science, which tried to reduce all mysteries of man's Self to a series of neurogenetic reactions. The philosophical 'conclusions' arrived at by its founder and its devotees somehow appeared to me too pat, too cocksure and over-simplified to come anywhere within the neighbourhood of ultimate truths; and they certainly did not point any new way to the good life.

But although such problems often occupied my mind, they did not really trouble me. I was never given much to metaphysical speculation or to a conscious quest for abstract 'truths'. My interests lay more in the direction of things seen and felt: people, activities and relationships. And it was just then that I was beginning to discover relationships with women.

²³ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), internationally-known Austrian psychoanalyst. Asad's younger maternal uncle, Dorian Feigenbaum (1887-1937), was a staunch follower of Freud and a regular contributor of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*.

²⁴ See Milan Dubrovic (1903-1994): *Veruntreute Geschichte. Die Wiender Salons und Literatencafés*. Vienna 1985. This book provides an interesting information about the atmosphere of Vienna Café-houses of that period, e.g., Café Herrenhof, Café Central and Café Museum.

²⁵ Alfred Adler (1870-1937), the President of the Viennese Psychoanalysis Association. See Edward Hoffman: *Alfred Adler. Ein Leben für die Individualpsychologie*. Munich 1997.

²⁶ Hermann Steckl is, perhaps, Wilhelm Steckl (1868-1940), a neurologist and psychoanalyst.

²⁷ Otto Gross (1877-1920), was a private lecturer of psychopathology in Graz; see Michael Raub: *Opposition und Anpassung. Eine individualpsychologische Interpretation von Leben und Werk des frühen Psychoanalytikers Otto Gross*. Frankfurt/a.M., 1994; Emanuel Hurwitz: *Otto Gross. "Paradies"-Sucher zwischen Freud und Jung*. Zürich 1979.

In the general process of dissolution of established social mores that followed the Great War, many restraints between the sexes had been loosened. What happened was, I think, not so much a revolt against the strait-lacedness of the nineteenth century as, rather, a passive rebound from a state of affairs in which certain moral standards had been deemed eternal and unquestionable to a social condition in which everything was questionable: a swinging of the pendulum from yesterday's comforting belief in the continuity of man's upward progress to the bitter disillusionment of Spengler,²⁸ to Nietzsche's moral relativism, and to the spiritual nihilism fostered by psychoanalysis. Looking backward on those early postwar years, I feel that the young men and women who spoke and wrote with so much enthusiasm about 'the body's freedom' were very far indeed from the ebullient spirit of Pan they so often invoked: their raptures were too self-conscious to be exuberant, and too easy-going to be revolutionary. Their sexual relations had as a rule, something casual about them — a certain matter-of-fact blandness which often led to promiscuity.

Even if I had felt myself bound by the remnants of conventional morality, it would have been extremely difficult to avoid being drawn into a trend that had become so widespread; as it was, I rather gloried, like so many others of my generation, in what was considered a 'rebellion against the hollow conventions.' Flirtations grew easily into affairs, and some of the affairs into passions. I do not think, however, that I was a libertine; for in all those youthful loves of mine, however flimsy and shortlived, there was always the lilt of a hope, vague but insistent, that the frightful isolation which so obviously separated man from man might be broken by the coalescence of one man and one woman.

My restlessness grew and made it increasingly difficult for me to pursue my university studies. At last I decided to give them up for good and to try my hand at journalism. My father, with probably more justification than I was then willing to concede, strongly objected to such a course, maintaining that before I decided to make writing my career I should at least prove to myself that I could write; 'and, in any case,' he concluded after one of our stormy discussions, 'a Ph.D. degree has never yet prevented a man from becoming a successful writer.' His reasoning was sound; but I was very young, very hopeful and very

²⁸ Oswald Spengler (1880-1936): *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Eng. tr. *Decline of the West*), appeared between 1918-1922.

restless. When I realized that he would not change his mind, there seemed nothing left but to start life on my own. Without telling anyone of my intentions, I said good-bye to Vienna one summer day in 1920 and boarded a train for Prague.

All I possessed, apart from my personal belongings, was a diamond ring which my mother, who had died a year earlier, had left me. This I sold through the good offices of a waiter in Prague's main literary café. Most probably I was thoroughly gypped in the transaction, but the sum of money which I received appeared like a fortune. With this fortune in my pocket I proceeded to Berlin, where some Viennese friends²⁹ introduced me to the magic circle of *littérateurs* and artists at the old Café des Westens.³⁰

I knew that henceforth I would have to make my way unaided; I would never again expect or accept financial help from my family. Some weeks later, when my father's anger had abated he wrote to me: 'I can already see you ending one day as a tramp in a roadside ditch'; to which I replied: 'No roadside ditch for me — I will come out on top.' How I would come out on top was not in the least clear to me; but I knew that I wanted to write and was, of course, convinced that the world of letters was waiting for me with arms wide open.

After a few months my cash ran out and I began to cast about for a job. To a young man with journalistic aspirations, one of the great dailies was the obvious choice; but I found out that I was no 'choice' to them. I did not find it out all at once. It took me weeks of tiresome tramping over the pavements of Berlin — for even a subway or streetcar fare had by then become a problem — and an endless number of humiliating interviews with editors-in-chief and news editors and sub-editors, to realize that, barring a miracle, a fledgling without a single printed line to his credit had not the slightest chance of being admitted to the sacred precincts of a newspaper. No miracle came my way. Instead, I became acquainted with hunger and spent several weeks subsisting almost entirely on the tea and the two rolls which my landlady served me in the morning. My literary friends at the Café des Westens could not do much for a raw and inexperienced 'would-be'; moreover, most of them lived in circumstances not much different from my own,

²⁹ Joseph Roth (1894-1939) was one of them, cf. Michael Bienert: *Joseph Roth in Berlin. Ein Lesebuch für Spaziergänger*. 3rd ed., Cologne 1997.

³⁰ Café des Westens, under the name of "Café Grössenwahn," was a *Treffpunkt* of the writers, journalists and artists. Romanisches Café was another meeting place of such people.

hovering from day to day on the brink of nothingness and struggling hard to keep their chins above water. Sometimes, in the flush of affluence produced by a luckily placed article or a picture sold, one or another of them would throw a party with beer and frankfurters and would ask me to partake of the sudden bounty; or a rich snob would invite a group of us strange intellectual gypsies to supper in his flat, and would gaze at us with awe while we gorged our empty stomachs with caviar canapés and champagne, repaying our host's munificence with clever talk and an 'insight into bohemian life.' But such treats were only exceptions. The rule of my days was stark hunger—and in the nights my sleep was filled with dreams of steaks and sausages and thick slices of buttered bread. Several times I was tempted to write to my father and beg him for help, which he surely would not have refused; but every time my pride stepped in and I wrote to him instead of the wonderful job and the good salary I had.

At last a lucky break came. I was introduced to F. W. Murnau,³¹ who just then was rising to fame as a film director (this was a few years before Hollywood drew him to still greater fame and to an untimely, tragic death); and Murnau, with that whimsical impulsiveness which endeared him to all his friends, at once took a fancy to the young man who was looking so eagerly, and with so much hope in the face of adversity, toward the future. He asked me if I would not like to work under him on a new film he was about to begin: and although the job was to be only temporary, I saw the gates of heaven opening before me as I stammered, 'Yes, I would...'

For two glorious months, free of all financial worries and entirely absorbed by a host of glittering experiences unlike anything I had ever known, I worked as Murnau's assistant. My self-confidence grew tremendously; and it was certainly not diminished by the fact that the leading lady of the film—a well-known and very beautiful actress—did not prove averse to a flirtation with the director's young assistant. When the film was finished and Murnau had to go abroad for a new assignment, I took leave of him with the conviction that my worst days were over.

Shortly afterward, my good friend Anton Kuh³² — a Viennese

³¹ Friedrich W. Murnau (1888-1931), see Fred Gehler/Ulrich Kasten: *Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau*. Augsburg 1990; Peter W. Jansen/Wolfram Schütte (eds.): *Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau*. Vienna 1990.

³² Anton Kuh (1890-1941), an Austrian Jew; see Elisabeth Nürnberger: *Anton Koch. Ein österreichischer, jüdischer Journalist and seine politische Berichterstattung in der*

journalist who had recently come to prominence in Berlin as a theatre critic — invited me to collaborate with him on a film scenario which he had been commissioned to write. I accepted the idea with enthusiasm and put, I believe, much work into the script; at any rate, the producer who had commissioned it gladly paid the sum agreed upon, which Anton and I divided fifty-fifty. In order to celebrate our 'entry into the world of films,' we gave a party in one of the most fashionable restaurants in Berlin; and when we received the bill, we found that practically our entire earnings had gone up in lobster, caviar and French wines. But our luck held out. We immediately sat down to writing another scenario — a fantasy woven around the figure of Balzac and a bizarre, entirely imaginary experience of his — and found a buyer on the very day it was completed. This time, however, I refused to 'celebrate' our success, and went instead on a several weeks' holiday to the Bavarian lakes.

After another year full of adventurous ups and downs in various cities of Central Europe, involving all manner of short-lived jobs, I succeeded at last in breaking into the world of journalism.

This break-through took place in the autumn of 1921, after another period of financial low. One afternoon, while I was sitting in the Café des Westens, tired and disconsolate, a friend of mine sat down at my table. When I recounted my troubles to him, he suggested:

'There might be a chance for you. Dammert³³ is starting a news agency of his own in co-operation with the United Press of America. It will be called the United Telegraph. I am sure that he will need a large number of sub-editors. I'll introduce you to him, if you like.'

Dr. Dammert was a well-known figure in the political circles of Berlin in the twenties. Prominent in the ranks of the Catholic Centre Party, and a wealthy man in his own right, he enjoyed an excellent reputation; and the idea of working under him appealed to me.

Next day my friend took me to Dr. Dammert's office. The elegant, middle-aged man was suave and friendly as he invited us to be seated.

'Mr. Fingal'³⁴ (that was my friend's name) 'has spoken to me

Zwischenkriegszeit und im Exil. Diss., University of Vienna 1989; Géza von Cziffra: *Der Kuh im Kaffeehaus. Die Goldenen Zwanziger in Anekdoten.* Berlin 1981.

³³ Rudolf Dammert (1879-1946), journalist and a publisher, was an editor of many newspapers, e.g., *Wormser Volkszeitung*, *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, *Münchener Allgemeinen Zeitung* etc.

³⁴ Perhaps Stefan Fingal, a journalist.

about you. Have you ever worked before as a journalist?’

‘No, sir,’ I replied, ‘but I have had plenty of other experience. I am something of an expert on Eastern European countries and know several of the languages.’ (In fact, the only Eastern European language I could speak was Polish, and I had only the vaguest idea of what was going on in that part of the world; but I was resolved not to let my chance be spoiled by undue modesty.)

‘Oh, that is interesting,’ remarked Dr. Dammert with a half-smile. ‘I have a penchant for experts. But, unfortunately, I can’t use an expert on Eastern European affairs just now.’

He must have seen the disappointment in my face, for he quickly continued: ‘Still, I may have an opening for you—although it may be somewhat beneath your standing, I wonder...’

‘What is the opening, sir?’ I enquired eagerly, thinking of my unpaid rent.

‘Well... I need several more telephonists.. . Oh, no, no, don’t worry, not at a switchboard: I mean telephonists to transmit news to the provincial newspapers ...’

This was indeed a comedown from my high expectations. I looked at Dr. Dammert and he looked at me; and when I saw the tightening of the humorous creases around his eyes, I knew that my boastful game was up.

‘I accept, sir,’ I answered with a sigh and a laugh.

The following week I started my new job. It was a boring job and a far cry from the journalistic ‘career’ I had been dreaming of. I had nothing to do but transmit by telephone, several times daily, news from a mimeographed sheet to the many provincial newspapers that subscribed to the service; but I was a good telephonist and the pay was good, too.

This went on for about a month. At the end of the month an unforeseen opportunity offered itself to me.

In that year of 1921 Soviet Russia was stricken by a famine of unprecedented dimensions. Millions of people were starving and hundreds of thousands dying. The entire European press was buzzing with gruesome descriptions of the situation; several foreign relief operations were being planned, among them one by Herbert Hoover, who had done so much for Central Europe after the Great War. A large-scale action within Russia was headed by Maxim Gorky; his dramatic appeals for aid were stirring the entire world; and it was rumoured that his wife would shortly visit the capitals of Central and Western Europe

in an attempt to mobilize public opinion for more effective help.

Being only a telephonist, I did not participate directly in the coverage of this sensational episode until a chance remark from one of my chance acquaintances (I had many of them in the strangest places suddenly drew me into its midst. The acquaintance was the night doorman at the Hotel Esplanade, one of Berlin's swankiest, and the remark had been: 'This Madame Gorky³⁵ is a very pleasant lady; one would never guess that she is a Bolshie . . .'

'Madame Gorky? Where the hell did you see *her*?'

My informant lowered his voice to a whisper: 'She is staying at our hotel. Came yesterday, but is registered under an assumed name. Only the manager knows who she really is. She doesn't want to be pestered by reporters.'

'And how do *you* know it?'

'We doormen know everything that goes on in the hotel,' he replied with a grin. 'Do you think we could keep our jobs for long if we didn't?'

What a story it would make to get an exclusive interview with Madame Gorky — the more so as not a word of her presence in Berlin had so far penetrated to the press. . . I was all at once on fire.

'Could you,' I asked my friend, 'somehow make it possible for me to see her?'

'Well, I don't know. She is obviously dead-set on keeping herself to herself... But I could do one thing: if you sit in the lobby in the evening, I might be able to point her out to you.'

That was a deal. I rushed back to my office at the United Telegraph; almost everyone had gone home by that time, but fortunately the news editor was still at his desk. I buttonholed him.

'Will you give me a press card if I promise to bring back a sensational story?'

'What kind of story?' he enquired suspiciously.

'You give me the press card and I'll give you the story. If I don't, you can always have the card back.'

Finally the old news-hound agreed, and I emerged from the office the proud possessor of a card which designated me as a representative of the United Telegraph.

The next few hours were spent in the lobby of the Esplanade. At nine o'clock my friend arrived on duty. From the doorway he winked

³⁵ Maria Fedorovna Andreeva (1868-1953).

at me, disappeared behind the reception desk and reappeared a few minutes later with the information that Madame Gorky was out.

'If you sit here long enough, you're sure to see her when she returns.'

At about eleven o'clock I caught my friend's signal. He was pointing surreptitiously to a lady who had just entered the revolving door: a small, delicate woman in her middle forties, dressed in an extremely well-cut black gown, with a long black silk cape trailing on the ground behind her. She was so genuinely aristocratic in her bearing that it was indeed difficult to imagine her as the wife of the 'working-man's poet,' and still more difficult as a citizen of the Soviet Union. Blocking her way, I bowed and proceeded to address her in my most engaging tones: 'Madame Gorky...?'

For an instant she appeared startled, but then a soft smile lighted her beautiful, black eyes and she answered in a German that bore only a faint trace of Slav accent: 'I am not Madame Gorky... You are mistaken - my name is so-and-so' (giving a Russian-sounding name which I have forgotten).

'No, Madame Gorky,' I persisted, 'I know that I am not mistaken. I also know that you do not want to be bothered by us reporters—but it would mean a great deal, a very great deal to me to be allowed to speak to you for a few minutes. This is my first chance to establish myself. I am sure you would not like to destroy that chance...?' I showed her my press card. 'I got it only today, and I will have to return it unless I produce the story of my interview with Madame Gorky.'

The aristocratic lady continued to smile. 'And if I were to tell you on my word of honour that I am not Madame Gorky, would you believe me then?'

'If you were to tell me anything on your word of honour, I would believe it.'

She burst out laughing. 'You seem to be a nice little boy.' (Her graceful head reached hardly to my shoulder.) 'I am not going to tell you any more lies. You win. But we can't spend the rest of the evening here in the lobby. Would you give me the pleasure of having tea with me in my rooms?'

And so I had the pleasure of having tea with Madame Gorky in her rooms. For nearly an hour she vividly described the horrors of the famine; and when I left her after midnight, I had a thick sheaf of notes with me.

The sub-editors on night duty at the United Telegraph opened

their eyes wide on seeing me at that unusual hour. But I did not bother to explain, for I had urgent work to do. Writing down my interview as quickly as I could, I booked, without waiting for editorial clearance, urgent press calls to all the newspapers we served.

Next morning the bomb burst. While none of the great Berlin dailies had a single word about Madame Gorky's presence in town, all the provincial papers served by our agency carried on their front pages the United Telegraph Special Representative's exclusive interview with Madame Gorky. The telephonist had made a first-class scoop.

In the afternoon a conference of editors took place in Dr. Dammert's office. I was called in and, after a preliminary lecture in which it was explained to me that no news item of importance ought ever to go out without first being cleared by the news editor, I was informed that I had been promoted to reporter.

At last I was a journalist...



Perhaps my heart knew it even on that day ten years ago, when I stood on the planks of the ship that was bearing me on my first journey to the Near East, southward through the Black Sea, through the opaqueness of a white, rimless, foggy night, through a foggy morning, toward the Bosphorus. The sea was leaden; sometimes foam sprayed over the deck; the pounding of the engines was like the beat of a heart.

I stood at the rail, looking out into the pale opaqueness. If you had asked me what I was thinking then, or what expectations I was carrying with me into this first venture to the East, I would hardly have been able to give a clear answer. Curiosity — perhaps: but, it was a curiosity which did not take itself very seriously because it seemed to aim at things of no great importance. The fog of my uneasiness, which seemed to find something related in the welling fog over the sea, was not directed toward foreign lands and the people of coming days. The images of a near future, the strange cities and appearances, the foreign clothes and manners which were to reveal themselves so soon to my eyes hardly occupied my thoughts. I regarded this journey as something accidental and took it, as it were, in my stride, as a pleasing but nevertheless not too important interlude. At that moment my thoughts were perturbed and distracted by what I took to be a preoccupation with my past.

The past? Did I have any? I was twenty-two years old ... But my generation—the generation of those who had been born at the turn of

the century—had lived perhaps more quickly than any other before it, and to me it seemed as if I were looking back into a long expanse of time. All the difficulties and adventures of those years stood before my eyes, all those longings and attempts and disappointments—and the women—and my first assaults on life . . . Those endless nights under stars, when one did not quite know what one wanted and walked with a friend through the empty streets, speaking of ultimate things, quite forgetting how empty the pockets were and how insecure the coming day...

In spite of my youth, it had not remained hidden from me that after the catastrophe of the Great War things were no longer right in the broken-up, discontented, emotionally tense and high-pitched European world. Its real deity, I saw, was no longer of a spiritual kind: it was Comfort...

I saw how confused and unhappy our life had become; how little there was of real communion between man and man despite all the strident, almost hysterical, insistence on 'community' and 'nation'; how far we had strayed from our instincts; and how narrow, how musty our souls had become. I saw all this: but somehow it never seriously occurred to me—as it never seems to have occurred to any of the people around me—that an answer, or at least partial answers, to these perplexities might perhaps be gained from other than Europe's own cultural experiences. Europe was the beginning and the end of all our thinking: and even my discovery of Lao-tse³⁶— at the age of seventeen or so — had not altered my outlook in this respect...



From that time onward, for several years, Lao-tse was to me a window through which I could look out into the glass-clear regions of a life that was far away from all narrowness and all self-created fears, free of the childish obsession which was forcing us, from moment to moment, always to secure our existence anew by means of 'material improvement' at any price. Not that material improvement seemed to be wrong or even unnecessary to me: on the contrary, I continued to regard it as good and necessary: but at the same time I was convinced that it

³⁶ Lao-tzu, a quasi-historical figure who came to be revered as a supreme godhead in Chinese Taoist and popular religious traditions. His divinity is understood to be both transcendental and immanent. (cf. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Editor in Chief Mircea Eliade, vol. 7, New York 1995, pp. 454-459, art. Judith Magee Bolitz.

could never achieve its end — to increase the sum total of human happiness—unless it were accompanied by a reorientation of our spiritual attitude and a new faith in absolute values...

Lao-tse receded, step by step, into the background of contemplative fantasies, and in time ceased to be more than the bearer of lovely poetry. One continued to read him off and on and felt each time the stab of a happy vision; but each time one put the book away with a wistful regret that this was only a dream call to some ivory tower. And although I felt very much at odds with the discordant bitter, greedy world of which I was a part, I did not wish to live in an ivory tower...

Not that I was unhappy. I had never been an introvert, and just then I was enjoying a more than usual measure of success in my practical affairs. While I was hardly inclined to give much weight to a 'career' as such, work at the United Telegraph — where owing to my knowledge of languages, I was now sub-editor in charge of the news service for the Scandinavian press — seemed to open many avenues into the broader world. The Café des Westens and its spiritual successor, the Romanisches Café—meeting places of the most outstanding writers, artists, journalists, actors, producers of the day — represented something like an intellectual home to me. I stood on friendly and sometimes even familiar terms with people who bore famous names, and regarded myself—at least in outlook if not in fame — as one of them. Deep friendships and fleeting loves came my way. Life was exciting, full of promise and colourful in the variety of its impressions. No, I was certainly not unhappy — only deeply dissatisfied, unsatisfied, not knowing what I was really after, and at the same time convinced, with the absurd arrogance of youth, that one day I would know it. And so I swung along on the pendulum of my heart's content and discontent in exactly the same way as many other young people were doing in those strange years: for, while none of us was really unhappy, only a very few seemed to be consciously happy...



And then one day, in the spring of 1922, I received a letter from my uncle Dorian.³⁷

³⁷ Dorian Feigenbaum (1887-1937). Obituary notice in: *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vi/1 (January 1937), pp. 1-3. As a psychoanalyst, he served in the army (1915-1918) and after the First World War, he spent a few months in Vienna. Afterwards he was shifted to Palestine where he was psychiatric consultant to the Government.

Dorian was my mother's youngest brother. Our relationship had always been rather that of friends than of uncle and nephew. He was a psychiatrist — one of the early pupils of Freud — and at that time headed a mental hospital in Jerusalem. As he was not a Zionist himself and did not particularly sympathize with the aims of Zionism — nor, for that matter, was attracted to the Arabs — he felt lonely and isolated in a world which had nothing to offer him but work and income. Being unmarried, he thought of his nephew as a likely companion in his solitude. In his letter he referred to those exciting days in Vienna when he had guided me into the new world of psychoanalysis; and he concluded: 'Why don't you come and stay some months with me here? I will pay for your journey coming and going; you will be free to return to Berlin whenever you like. And while you are here, you will be living in a delightful old Arab stone house which is cool in summer (and damned cold in winter). We shall spend our time well together. I have plenty of books here, and when you get tired of observing the quaint scenery around you, you can read as much as you want...'

I made up my mind with the promptness that has always characterized my major decisions. Next morning I informed Dr. Dammert at the United Telegraph that 'important business considerations' forced me to go to the Near East, and that I would therefore have to quit the agency within a week...

If anyone had told me at that time that my first acquaintance with the world of Islam would go far beyond a holiday experience and indeed become a turning point in my life, I would have laughed off the idea as utterly preposterous. Not that I was impervious to the allure of countries associated in my mind—as in the minds of most Europeans—with the romantic atmosphere of the *Arabian Nights*: I did anticipate colour, exotic customs, picturesque encounters; but it never occurred to me to anticipate adventures in the realm of the spirit as well, and the new journey did not seem to hold out any special promise of a personal nature. All the ideas and impressions that had previously come my way I had instinctively related to the Western world-view, hoping to attain to a broader reach of feeling and perception within the only cultural environment known to me. And, if you come to think of it, how could I have felt differently? I was only a very, very young European, brought up in the belief that Islam and all it stood for was no more than a romantic by-path of man's history, not even quite 'respectable' from the spiritual and ethical points of view, and therefore not to be mentioned in the same breath, still less to be compared, with the only two faiths which

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the West considers fit to be taken seriously: Christianity and Judaism.

It was with this hazy, European bias against things Islamic (though not, of course, against the romanticized outward appearances of Muslim life) that I set out in the summer of 1922 on my journey. If, in fairness to myself, I cannot say that I was self-absorbed in an individual sense, I was none the less, without knowing it, deeply enmeshed in that self-absorbed, culturally egocentric mentality so characteristic of the West at all times.



And now I stood on the planks of a ship on my way to the East. A leisurely journey had brought me to Constanza and thence into this foggy morning...

'Good morning,' said a deep, full voice. I turned around and recognized the black cassock of my companion of the previous evening, and the friendly smile on a face which I had grown to like during the few hours of our acquaintance. The Jesuit *padre* was half Polish and half French and taught history at a college in Alexandria; he was now returning there from a vacation. We had spent the evening after embarkation in lively talk. Although it soon became apparent that we differed widely on many issues, we had, nevertheless, many points of interest in common: and I was already mature enough to recognize that here was a brilliant, serious and at the same time humorous mind at work.

'Good morning, Father Felix; look at the sea...'

The Bosphorous opened itself to us, a broad waterway framed on both sides by rocky hills. Here and there one could see pillared, airy palaces, terraced gardens, cypresses rising up in all their dark height, and old janissary castles, heavy masses of stone hanging over the water like the nests of birds of prey...

The ancient, twin-towered fortress of Rumili Hissar appeared; one of its crenellated walls sloped down almost to the water's edge; on the shore, within the semicircle formed by the fortress walls, lay dreaming a little Turkish cemetery with broken-down tombstones...



A few days later we landed at Alexandria and the same afternoon I went on to Palestine...

During that autumn I was living in my uncle Dorian's house just inside the Old City of Jerusalem. It rained almost every day and, not

being able to go out much, I often sat at the window which overlooked a large yard behind the house. This yard belonged to an old Arab who was called *hajji* because he had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca; he rented out donkeys for riding and carrying and thus made the yard a kind of caravanserai.

Every morning, shortly before dawn, loads of vegetables and fruits were brought there on camels from the surrounding villages and sent out on donkeys into the narrow bazaar streets of the town. In daytime the heavy bodies of the camels could be seen resting on the ground; men were always noisily attending to them and to the donkeys, unless they were forced to take refuge in the stables from the streaming rain. They were poor, ragged men, those camel and donkey drivers, but they behaved like great lords. When they sat together at meals on the ground and ate flat loaves of wheat bread with a little bit of cheese or a few olives, I could not but admire the nobility and ease of their bearing and their inner quiet: you could see that they had respect for themselves and the everyday things of their lives. The *hajji*, hobbling around on a stick—for he suffered from arthritis and had swollen knees — was a kind of chieftain among them; they appeared to obey him without question. Several times a day he assembled them for prayer and, if it was not raining too hard, they prayed in the open: all the men in a single, long row and he as their *imam* in front of them. They were like soldiers in the precision of their movements — they would bow together in the direction of Mecca, rise again, and then kneel down and touch the ground with their foreheads; they seemed to follow the inaudible words of their leader, who between the prostrations stood barefoot on his prayer carpet, eyes closed, arms folded over his chest, soundlessly moving his lips and obviously lost in deep absorption: you could see that he was praying with his whole soul.

It somehow disturbed me to see so real a prayer combined with almost mechanical body movements...

Years later I realized that with his simple explanation the *hajji* had opened to me the first door to Islam; but even then, long before any thought that Islam might become my own faith entered my mind, I began to feel an unwonted humility whenever I saw, as I often did, a man standing barefoot on his prayer rug, or on a straw mat, or on the bare earth, with his arms folded over his chest and his head lowered, entirely submerged within himself, oblivious of what was going on around him, whether it was in a mosque or on the sidewalk of a busy street: a man at peace with himself...



The 'Arab stone house' of which Dorian had written was really delightful. It stood on the fringe of the Old City near the Jaffa Gate. Its wide, high-ceilinged rooms seemed to be saturated with memories of the patrician life that had passed through them in earlier generations and the walls reverberated with the living present surging into them from the bazaar nearby — sights and sounds and smells that were unlike anything I had experienced before.

From the roof terrace I could see the sharply outlined area of the Old City with its network of irregular streets and alleys carved in stone. At the other end, seemingly near in its mighty expanse, was the site of Solomon's Temple; the Al-Aqsa Mosque — the most sacred after those of Mecca and Medina — stood on its farthest rim, and the Dome of the Rock in the centre. Beyond it, the Old City walls fell off toward the Valley of Kidron; and beyond the valley grew softly rounded, barren hills, their slopes thinly spotted with olive trees. Toward the east there was a little more fertility, and you could see there a garden sloping down toward the road, dark-green, hedged in by walls: the Garden of Gethsemane. From its midst shone between olive trees and cypresses the golden, onion-shaped domes of the Russian Church...

Jerusalem was an entirely new world to me. There were historic memories seeping from every corner of the ancient city: streets that had heard Isaiah preach, cobblestones over which Christ had walked, walls that had been old when the heavy step of Roman legionaries echoed from them, arches over doorways that bore inscriptions of Saladin's time. There was the deep blue of the skies, which might not have been unfamiliar to someone who knew other Mediterranean countries: but to me, who had grown up in a far less friendly climate, this blueness was like a call and a promise. The houses and streets seemed to be covered with a tender, oscillating glaze; the people were full of spontaneous movement and grand of gesture. The people — that is, the Arabs: for it was they who from the very beginning impressed themselves on my consciousness as the people of the land, people who had grown out of its soil and its history and were one with the surrounding air. Their garments were colourful and of a Biblical sweep of drapery, and each of them, *fellah* or beduin (for you could often see beduins who came to town to buy or sell their goods), wore them in a manner quite his own, ever so slightly different from the others, as if he had invented a personal fashion on the spur of the moment.

In front of Dorian's house, at a distance of perhaps forty yards, rose the steep, time-worn walls of David's Castle, which was part of the ramparts of the Old City — a typical medieval Arab citadel, probably erected on Herodian foundations, with a slim watchtower like a minaret. (Although it has no direct connection with King David, the Jews have always called it after him because here, on Mount Zion, the old royal palace is said to have stood.) On the Old City side there was a low, broad tower, through which the gateway went, and a bridge of stone arched across the old moat to the gate. That arched bridge was apparently a customary place of rendezvous for beduins when they had occasion to come into the city. One day I noticed a tall beduin standing there without motion, silhouetted against the silver-grey sky like a figure from an old legend. His face, with sharp cheekbones framed in a short, red-brown beard, bore an expression of deep gravity; it was sombre, as if he expected something and yet did not feel expectant. His wide, brown-and-white-striped cloak was worn and tattered — and the fanciful idea came to me, I do not know why, that it had been worn out in many months of danger and flight. Was he, perhaps, one of that handful of warriors who had accompanied young David on his flight from the dark jealousy of Saul, his king? Perhaps David was asleep just now, hiding somewhere in a cave in the Judean hills, and this man here, this faithful and brave friend, had stealthily come with a companion into the royal city to find out how Saul felt about their leader and whether it was safe for him to return. And now this friend of David was waiting here for his comrade, full of dark forebodings: it was not good news that they would bring David ...

Suddenly the beduin moved, started walking down the ramp, and my dream-fantasy broke. And then I remembered with a start: this man was an Arab, while those others, those figures of the Bible — were Hebrews! But my astonishment was only of a moment's duration; for all at once I knew, with that clarity which sometimes bursts within us like lightning and lights up the world for the length of a heartbeat, that David and David's time, like Abraham and Abraham's time, were closer to their Arabian roots — and so to the beduin of to-day — than to the Jew of today, who claims to be their descendant...

I often sat on the stone balustrade below the Jaffa Gate and watched the throng of people going into or coming out of the Old City. Here they rubbed against each other, jostled one another, Arab and Jew, all possible variations of both. There were the strong-boned *fellahin* with their white or brown headcloths or orange-coloured turbans. There were

beduins with sharp, clear cut and, almost without exception, lean faces, wearing their cloaks in a strangely self confident manner, frequently with hands on hips and elbows wide apart, as if they took it for granted that everyone would make way for them. There were peasant women in black or blue calico dresses embroidered in white across the bottom, often carrying baskets on their heads and moving with a supple, easy grace. Seen from behind, many a woman of sixty could be taken for a young girl. Their eyes also seemed to remain clear and untouched by age — unless they happened to be affected by trachoma, that evil 'Egyptian' eye disease which is the curse of all countries east of the Mediterranean.

And there were the Jews: indigenous Jews, wearing a *turbush* and a wide, voluminous cloak, in their facial type strongly resembling the Arabs; Jews from Poland and Russia, who seemed to carry with them so much of the smallness and narrowness of their past lives in Europe that it was surprising to think they claimed to be of the same stock as the proud Jew from Morocco or Tunisia in his white *burnus*. But although the European Jews were so obviously out of all harmony with the picture that surrounded them, it was they who set the tone of Jewish life and politics and thus seemed to be responsible for the almost visible friction between Jews and Arabs.

What did the average European know of the Arabs in those days? Practically nothing. When he came to the Near East he brought with him some romantic and erroneous notions; and if he was well-intentioned and intellectually honest, he had to admit that he had no idea at all about the Arabs. I, too, before I came to Palestine, had never thought of it as an Arab land. I had, of course, vaguely known that 'some' Arabs lived there, but I imagined them to be only nomads in desert tents and idyllic oasis dwellers. Because most of what I had read about Palestine in earlier days had been written by Zionists — who naturally had only their own problems in view — I had not realized that the towns also were full of Arabs — that, in fact, in 1922 there lived in Palestine nearly five Arabs to every Jew, and that, therefore, it was an Arab country to a far higher degree than a country of Jews.

When I remarked on this to Mr. Ussyshkin,³⁸ chairman of the Zionist Committee of Action, whom I met during that time, I had the impression that the Zionists were not inclined to give much consideration to the fact of Arab majority; nor did they seem to attribute

³⁸ Abraham Menachem Mendel Ussischkin (1863-1941), see Asad's first book entitled *Unromantisches Morgenland*. Frankfurt/a.M. 1924, p. 58 and *Who's Who in Jewish History*, by Joan Comay. London 1995 (1974), pp. 369-370.

any real importance to the Arabs' opposition to Zionism. Mr. Ussyshkin's response showed nothing but contempt for the Arabs:

'There is no real Arab movement here against us; that is, no movement with roots in the people. All that you regard as opposition is in reality nothing but the shouting of a few disgruntled agitators. It will collapse of itself within a few months or at most a few years.'

This argument was far from satisfactory to me. From the very beginning I had a feeling that the whole idea of Jewish settlement in Palestine was artificial, and, what was worse, that it threatened to transfer all the complications and insoluble problems of European life into a country which might have remained happier without them. The Jews were not really coming to it as one returns to one's homeland; they were rather bent on *making* it into a homeland conceived on European patterns and with European aims. In short, they were strangers within the gates. And so I did not find anything wrong in the Arabs' determined resistance to the idea of a Jewish homeland in their midst; on the contrary, I immediately realized that it was the Arabs who were being imposed upon and were rightly defending themselves against such an imposition.

In the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised the Jews a 'national home' in Palestine, I saw a cruel political manoeuvre designed to foster the old principle, common to all colonial powers, of 'divide and rule'. In the case of Palestine, this principle was the more flagrant as in 1916 the British had promised the then ruler of Mecca, Sharif Husayn, as a price for his help against the Turks, an independent Arab state which was to comprise all countries between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. They not only broke their promise a year later by concluding with France the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement (which established French Dominion over Syria and the Lebanon), but also, by implication, excluded Palestine from the obligations they had assumed with regard to the Arabs.

Although of Jewish origin myself, I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism. Apart from my personal sympathy for the Arabs, I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a foreign Great Power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining to majority in the country and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been since time immemorial. Consequently, I was inclined to take the side of the Arabs whenever the Jewish-Arab question was brought up which, of course, happened very often. This attitude of mine beyond the comprehension of practically all the Jews

with whom I came in contact during those months. They could not understand what I saw in the Arabs who, according to them, were no more than a mass of backward people whom they looked upon with a feeling not much different from that of the European settlers in Central Africa. They were not in the least interested in what the Arabs thought, almost none of them took pains to learn Arabic; and everyone accepted without question the dictum that Palestine was the rightful heritage of the Jews.

I still remember a brief discussion I had on this score with Dr. Chaim Weizmann,³⁹ the undisputed leader of the Zionist movement. He had come on one of his periodic visits to Palestine (his permanent residence was, I believe, in London), and I met him in the house of a Jewish friend. One could not but be impressed by the boundless energy of this man — an energy that manifested itself even in his bodily movements, in the long, springy stride with which he paced up and down the room — and by the power of intellect revealed in the broad forehead and the penetrating glance of his eyes.

He was talking of the financial difficulties which were besetting the dream of a Jewish National Home, and the insufficient response to this dream among people abroad; and I had the disturbing impression that even he, like most of the other Zionists, was inclined to transfer the moral responsibility for all that was happening in Palestine to the 'outside world'. This impelled me to break through the deferential hush with which all the other people present were listening to him, and to ask:

'And what about the Arabs?'

I must have committed a *faux pas* by thus bringing a jarring note into the conversation, for Dr. Weizmann turned his face slowly toward me, put down the cup he had been holding in his hand, and repeated my question:

'What about the Arabs ... ?'

'Well — how can you ever hope to make Palestine your homeland in the face of the vehement opposition of the Arabs who, after all, are in the majority in this country?'

The Zionist leader shrugged his shoulders and answered drily: 'We expect they won't be in a majority after a few years.'

'Perhaps so. You have been dealing with this problem for years and must know the situation better than I do. But quite apart from the

³⁹ Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), first President of Israel, author of *Trial and Errors*, New York 1966 and *Who's Who in Jewish History*, by Joan Comay. New ed. rev. by Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok, London 1995 (1974), pp. 375-382.

political difficulties which Arab opposition may or may not put in your way — does not the moral aspect of the question ever bother you? Don't you think that it is wrong on your part to displace the people who have always lived in this country?"

'But it is *our* country,' replied Dr. Weizmann, raising his eyebrows. 'We are doing no more than taking back what we have been wrongly deprived of.'

'But you have been away from Palestine for nearly two thousand years! Before that you had ruled this country, and hardly ever the whole of it, for less than five hundred years. Don't you think that the Arabs could, with equal justification, demand Spain for themselves — for, after all, they held sway in Spain for nearly seven hundred years and lost it entirely only five hundred years ago?'

Dr. Weizmann had become visibly impatient: 'Nonsense. The Arabs had only *conquered* Spain; it had never been their original homeland, and so it was only right that in the end they were driven out by the Spaniards.'

'Forgive me,' I retorted, 'but it seems to me that there is some historical oversight here. After all, the Hebrews also came as conquerors to Palestine. Long before them were many other Semitic and non-Semitic tribes settled here — the Amorites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Hittites. Those tribes continued living here even in the days of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They continued living here after the Romans drove our ancestors away. They are living here today. The Arabs who settled in Syria and Palestine after their conquest in the seventh century were always only a small minority of the population; the rest of what we describe today as Palestinian or Syrian "Arabs" are in reality only the Arabianized, original inhabitants of the country. Some of them became Muslims in the course of centuries, others remained Christians; the Muslims naturally inter-married with their co-religionists from Arabia. But can you deny that the bulk of those people in Palestine, who speak Arabic, whether Muslims or Christians, are direct-line descendants of the original inhabitants: original in the sense of having lived in this country centuries before the Hebrews came to it?'

Dr. Weizmann smiled politely at my outburst and turned the conversation to other topics.

I did not feel happy about the outcome of my intervention. I had of course not expected any of those present — least of all Dr. Weizmann himself — to subscribe to my conviction that the Zionist

idea was highly vulnerable on the moral plane: but I had hoped that my defence of the Arab cause would at least give rise to some sort of uneasiness on the part of the Zionist leadership — an uneasiness which might bring about more introspection and thus, perhaps, a greater readiness to admit the existence of a possible moral right in the opposition of the Arabs. . . . None of this had come about. Instead, I found myself facing a blank wall of staring eyes: a censorious disapproval of my temerity, which dared question the unquestionable right of the Jews to the land of their forefathers . . .

How was it possible, I wondered, for people endowed with so much creative intelligence as the Jews to think of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms alone? Did they not realize that the problem of the Jews in Palestine could, in the long run, be solved only through friendly co-operation with the Arabs? Were they so hopelessly blind to the painful future which their policy must bring? — to the struggles, the bitterness and the hatred to which the Jewish island, even if temporarily successful, would forever remain exposed in the midst of a hostile Arab sea?

And how strange, I thought, that a nation which had suffered so many wrongs in the course of its long and sorrowful diaspora was now, in single-minded pursuit of its own goal, ready to inflict a grievous wrong on another nation — and a nation, too, that was innocent of all that past Jewish suffering. Such a phenomenon, I knew, was not unknown to history; but it made me, none the less, very sad to see it enacted before my eyes.



By that time my absorption in the political scene in Palestine was grounded not merely in my sympathy for the Arabs and my worry about the Zionist experiment, but also in a revival of my journalistic interests: for I had become a special correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*,⁴⁰ then one of the most outstanding newspapers in Europe. This connection had come about almost by accident.

One evening, while sorting out old papers which were cluttering up one of my suitcases, I found the press card issued to me a year before in Berlin as a representative of the United Telegraph. I was about to tear it up when Dorian grabbed my hand and jokingly exclaimed:

⁴⁰ Cf. *Unromantisches Morgenland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148; Wolf Kaiser: *Palästina-Erez Israel. Deutschsprachige Reisebeschreibungen jüdischer Autoren von der Jahrhundertwende bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hildesheim 1992, pp. 267-283.

'Don't! If you present this card at the office of the High Commissioner, you will receive a few days later an invitation to lunch at Government House... Journalists are very desirable creatures in this country.'

Although I did tear up the useless card, Dorian's joke struck a response in my mind. I was, of course, not interested in a luncheon invitation from Government House — but why should I not utilize the rare opportunity of being in the Near East at a time when so few journalists from Central Europe could travel there? Why should I not resume my journalistic work — and not with the United Telegraph but with one of the great dailies? And as suddenly as I had always been wont to make important decisions, I now decided to break into *real* journalism.

Despite my year's work at the United Telegraph, I had no direct connection with any important newspaper, and as I had never yet published anything in my own name, it was entirely unknown to the daily press.. This, however, did not discourage me. I wrote an article on some of my impressions in Palestine and sent copies of it to no less than ten German newspapers with a proposal to write a series of articles on the Near East.

This was in the last months of 1922 — a time of the most catastrophic inflation in Germany. The German press was hard-put to survive, and only a very few newspapers could afford to pay foreign correspondents in hard currency. And so it was not in the least surprising that one after another of the ten newspapers to which I had sent the sample article replied in more or less polite terms of refusal. Only one of the ten accepted my suggestion and, apparently impressed by what I had written, appointed me its roving special correspondent in the Near East, enclosing, in addition, a contract for a book to be written on my return. That one newspaper was the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. I was almost bowled over when I saw that I had not merely succeeded in establishing a connection with a newspaper — and what a newspaper! — but had at the first stroke achieved a status that might be envied by many an old journalist.

There was, of course, a snag in it. Owing to the inflation, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* could not pay me in hard currency. The remuneration which they apologetically offered me was in terms of German marks; and I knew as well as they did that it would hardly suffice to pay for the stamps on the envelopes which would contain my articles. But to be special correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was a distinction that by

far outweighed the temporary handicap of not being paid for it. I began to write articles on Palestine, hoping that sooner or later some lucky twist of fortune would enable me to travel all over the Near East.



I now had many friends in Palestine, both Jews and Arabs. The Zionists, it is true, looked upon me with some sort of puzzled suspicion because of the sympathy for the Arabs which was so apparent in my dispatches to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Evidently they could not make up their minds whether I had been 'bought' by the Arabs (for in Zionist Palestine people had become accustomed to explain almost every happening in terms of money) or whether I was simply a freakish intellectual in love with the exotic. But not all Jews living in Palestine at that time were Zionists. Some of them had come there not in pursuit of a political aim, but out of a religious longing for the Holy Land and its Biblical associations.

To this group belonged my Dutch friend Jacob de Haan,⁴¹ a small, plump, blond-bearded man in his early forties, who had formerly taught law at one of the leading universities in Holland and was now special correspondent of the Amsterdam *Handelsblad* and the London *Daily Express*. A man of deep religious convictions — as 'orthodox' as any Jew of Eastern Europe — he did not approve of the idea of Zionism, for he believed that the return of his people to the Promised Land had to await the coming of the Messiah.

'We Jews,' he said to me on more than one occasion, 'were driven away from the Holy Land and scattered all over the world because we had fallen short of the task God had conferred upon us. We had been chosen by Him to preach His Word, but in our stubborn pride we began to believe that He had made us a "chosen nation" for our own sakes — and thus we betrayed Him. Now nothing remains for us but to repent and to cleanse our hearts; and when we become worthy once again to be the hearers of His Message, He will send a Messiah to lead His servants back to the Promised Land ...'

'But,' I asked, 'does not this Messianic idea underlie the Zionist movement as well? You know that I do not approve of it: but is it not a natural desire of every people to have a national home of its own?'

⁴¹ Jacob Israël de Haan (1881-1924), an anti-Zionist Dutch poet and journalist, cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Jerusalem), vol. 7 (1971), pp. 1002-1003 (art. H. Boas); Jaap Meijer: *De zoon van een gazzan. Het leven van Jacob Israël de Haan, 1881-1924*. Amsterdam 1967.

Dr. de Haan looked at me quizzically: 'Do you think that history is but a series of accidents? I don't. It was not without a purpose that God made us lose our land and dispersed us; but the Zionists do not want to admit this to themselves. They suffer from the same spiritual blindness that caused our downfall. The two thousand years of Jewish exile and unhappiness have taught them nothing. Instead of making an attempt to understand the innermost causes of our unhappiness, they now try to circumvent it, as it were, by building a "national home" on foundations provided by Western power politics; and in the process of building a national home, they are committing the crime of depriving another people of its home.'

Jacob de Haan's political views naturally made him most unpopular with the Zionists (indeed, a short time after I left Palestine, I was shocked to learn that he had been shot down one night by terrorists). When I knew him, his social intercourse was limited to a very few Jews of his own way of thought, some Europeans, and Arabs. For the Arabs he seemed to have a great affection, and they, on their part, thought highly of him and frequently invited him to their houses. As a matter of fact, at that period they were not yet universally prejudiced against Jews as such. It was only subsequent to the Balfour Declaration - that is, after centuries of good-neighbourly relations and a consciousness of racial kinship - that the Arabs had begun to look upon the Jews as political enemies; but even in the changed circumstances of the early Twenties, they still clearly differentiated between Zionists and Jews who were friendly toward them like Dr. de Haan.

* * * * *

Throughout the years I have spent in the Middle East — as a sympathetic outsider from 1922 to 1926, and as a Muslim sharing the aims and hopes of the Islamic community ever since — I have witnessed the steady European encroachment on Muslim cultural life and political independence; and wherever Muslim peoples try to defend themselves against this encroachment, European public opinion invariably labels their resistance, with an air of hurt innocence, as 'xenophobia'...

* * * * *

I first began to realize this in Palestine, in 1922, when I observed the equivocal role of the British administration with regard to the conflict between the Arabs and the Zionists; and it became fully obvious

to me early in 1923, when after months of wandering all over Palestine I came to Egypt, which at that time was in almost continual upheaval against the British 'protectorate'...

My coming to Egypt in those days had been due to my wish to extend the scope of my work for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to other countries besides Palestine. Dorian's circumstances did not permit him to finance such a tour; but when he saw how strongly I desired it, he advanced me a small sum sufficient for the railway journey from Jerusalem to Cairo and a fortnight's stay there.

In Cairo I found lodgings in a narrow alley in a quarter inhabited mainly by Arab artisans and small Greek shopkeepers. The landlady was an old Triestine, tall, thickset, cumbrous, grey; she drank from morning till evening heavy Greek wine and floundered from one mood into another. Hers was a violent, passionate temperament that never seemed to have found itself; but she was friendly toward me and made me feel well in her presence.

After a week or so, my cash was approaching its end. As I did not want to return so soon to Palestine and the safety of my uncle's house, I began to look around for some other means of subsistence.

My Jerusalem friend, Dr. de Haan, had given me a letter of introduction to a business man in Cairo;⁴² and to him I went in search of advice. He proved to be a large, genial Hollander with intellectual interests far exceeding his own sphere of activities. From Jacob de Haan's letter he learned that I was a correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and when, at his request, I showed him some of my recent articles, he raised his eyebrows in astonishment...

The office to which he directed me lay in one of the older quarters of Cairo, not far from my lodgings: a dingy, narrow lane bordered by once-patrician houses now converted into offices and cheap apartments. My prospective employer, an elderly, bald-headed Egyptian with the face of a time-mellowed vulture, happened to be in need of a part-time clerk to take charge of his French correspondence; and I was able to satisfy him that I could fill the role in spite of my utter lack of business experience. We quickly struck a bargain. I would have to work only three hours a day; the salary was correspondingly low, but it would be enough to pay for my rent and to keep me indefinitely in bread, milk and olives...



⁴² Amir 'Abdullah ibn Hussain. During Asad's extensive Middle Eastern travels, he was assisted by Reza Tawfiq Bey.

Opposite my house, so close that you could almost touch it, stood a little mosque with a tiny minaret from which five times a day the call to prayer was sounded. A white-turbaned man would appear on the gallery, raise his hands, and begin to chant: '*Allahu akbar* — God is the Greatest! And I bear witness that Muhammad is God's Messenger...' As he slowly turned toward the four points of the compass, the ring of his voice climbed upward, grew into the clear air, rocking on the deep, throaty sounds of the Arabic language, swaying, advancing and retreating. The voice was a dark baritone, soft and strong, capable of a great range; but you could perceive that it was fervour and not art that made it so beautiful.

This chant of the *mu'azzin* was the theme song of my days and evenings in Cairo — just as it had been the theme song in the Old City of Jerusalem and was destined to remain in all my later wanderings through Muslim lands. It sounded the same everywhere in spite of the differences of dialect and intonation which might be evident in the people's daily speech: a unity of sound which made me realize in those days at Cairo how deep was the inner unity of all Muslims, and how artificial and insignificant were the dividing lines between them. They were one in their way of thinking and judging between right and wrong, and one in their perception of what constitutes the good life.

It seemed to me that for the first time I had come across a community in which kinship between man and man was not due to accidents of common racial or economic interests but to something far deeper and far more stable: a kinship of common outlook which lifted all barriers of loneliness between man and man...

* * * * *

In the summer of 1923, enriched by a better understanding of Middle Eastern life and politics, I returned to Jerusalem.

Through my good friend Jacob de Haan I became acquainted with Amir Abdullah of neighbouring Transjordan, who invited me to visit his country. There I saw for the first time a true beduin land...

* * * * *

I did not intend to remain indefinitely in Palestine; and it was again Jacob de Haan who helped me. Himself a journalist of established reputation, he had many connections all over Europe. His recommendation secured for me contracts with two small newspapers,

one in Holland⁴³ and the other in Switzerland,⁴⁴ for a series of articles to be paid in Dutch guilders and Swiss francs. As these were provincial newspapers of no great standing, they could not afford to pay a large remuneration; but to me, whose habits were simple, the money I received from them appeared ample to finance my planned journey through the Near East.

I wanted to go to Syria first; but the French authorities, so recently established there in the midst of a hostile population, were unwilling to give a visa to an Austrian 'ex-enemy alien'. This was a bitter blow, but there was nothing I could do about it; and so I decided to go to Haifa and there to board a ship for Istanbul, which in any case was included in my programme.

On the train journey from Jerusalem to Haifa a calamity befell me: I lost a coat containing my wallet and passport. All that I had left were the few silver coins in my trousers pocket. A voyage to Istanbul was, for the time being, out of the question: no passport, no money. Nothing remained but to return by bus to Jerusalem; the fare would have to be paid on arrival with money borrowed, as usual, from Dorian. In Jerusalem I would have to wait for weeks for another passport from the Austrian consulate in Cairo (for at that time there was none in Palestine) and for further dribblets of money from Holland and Switzerland.

And so it came about that on the next morning I found myself before a bus office on the outskirts of Haifa. The negotiations about the fare were completed. There was one hour until the departure of the bus, and to while away the time I paced up and down the road, deeply disgusted with myself and with the fate that had forced me into so ignominious a retreat. Waiting is always an evil thing; and the thought of returning to Jerusalem defeated, with my tail between my legs, was most galling—the more so as Dorian had always been sceptical about my ability to realize my plans on the basis of such meagre funds. Moreover, I would not see Syria now, and God alone knew if I would ever come back to this part of the world. It was, of course, always possible that at some later date the *Frankfurter Zeitung* would finance another journey to the Middle East, and that one day the French might lift the embargo on ex-enemy aliens; but that was not certain, and in the meantime I would not see Damascus ... Why, I asked myself bitterly, was Damascus denied

⁴³ *De Telegraaf* (Amsterdam).

⁴⁴ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Zürich).

to me ?

But — was it really? Of course - no passport, no money. But was it absolutely necessary to have a passport and money .. ?

And, having come so far in my thoughts, I suddenly stopped in my tracks. One could, if one had grit enough, travel on foot, availing oneself of the hospitality of Arab villagers; and one could, perhaps, somehow smuggle oneself across the frontier without bothering about passports and visas ...

And before I was quite aware of it, my mind was made up: I was going to Damascus...

* * * * *

I walked on the road to Galilee. In the afternoon the Plain of Esdrelon lay on the right below me, flecked with rags of light and shadow. I passed through Nazareth and before nightfall reached an Arab village shaded by pepper trees and cypresses...

In the days that followed, the rust-brown of the Judean hills with their bluish-grey and violet shadows gradually gave way to the more gay and mellow hills of Galilee. Springs and little streams unexpectedly made their appearance. Vegetation became more luxuriant. In groups stood thickly leafed olive trees and tall, dark cypresses; the last summer flowers could still be seen on the hill-sides...

The northernmost point in Palestine was the Jewish colony of Metulla, which, I had learned earlier, was a kind of gap between British-administered Palestine and French Syria. On the basis of an agreement between the two governments, this and two neighbouring colonies were shortly to be incorporated into Palestine. During those few weeks of transition Metulla was not effectively supervised by either of the two governments, and thus appeared to be an ideal place from which to slip into Syria. It was, I understood, only later, on the highways, that identification papers would be demanded of the traveller. The Syrian control was said to be very strict; it was practically impossible to go far without being stopped by gendarmes. As Metulla was officially still considered part of Syria, every one of its adult inhabitants held, like elsewhere in the country, an identity certificate issued by the French authorities. To secure such a paper for myself became my most pressing task.

I made some discreet enquiries and was finally guided to the house of a man who might be prepared to part with his certificate for a consideration. He was a large person in his late thirties and was

described as such in the crumpled and greasy document which he pulled out of his breast pocket; but as the paper bore no photograph, the problem was not insoluble...

After some minutes of haggling we settled on thirty five piasters and the document was mine. It consisted of a printed sheet with two columns — one French and the other Arabic — the relevant data having been inserted in ink on the dotted lines. The 'personal description' did not bother me much, for, as is usual with such descriptions, it was wonderfully vague. But the age mentioned was thirty-nine—while I was twenty-three, and looked twenty. Even a very careless police officer would immediately notice the discrepancy; and so it became necessary to change the age entry. Now if it had been mentioned in one place only, the change would not have been so difficult, but unfortunately it was given in French as well as in Arabic. Despite my careful penning, I achieved what could only be described as an unconvincing forgery; to anybody with eyes in his head it would be obvious that the figures had been altered in both columns. But that could not be helped. I would have to rely on my luck and the negligence of the gendarmes.

Early in the morning my business friend led me to a gully behind the village, pointed to some rocks about half a mile beyond, and said, 'There is Syria'...

I reached the rocks and passed them: and now I was in Syria...

A wide, barren plain lay before me; far away on the horizon I saw the outlines of trees, and something that looked like houses; it must be the town of Baniyas...

I retreated the way I had come, made a circuit around the town, and proceeded on my way to Damascus...



Exactly two weeks after I had left Haifa I arrived at the big village — almost a town — of Majdal ash-Shams, which was inhabited mainly by Druzes and a few Christians...

As I was now deep in Syria, with several possible ways leading to Damascus, I decided to take my Druze host into my confidence and ask his advice. Knowing that no Arab would ever betray his guest, I placed all the facts squarely before him, including the fact that I was travelling on a false identity certificate. I was told that it would be extremely risky for me to travel on the highway because from here onward it was patrolled by French gendarmes, who would not let me

pass as easily as the Syrians had done...

Next morning, accompanied by the young Druze, I set out on what must have been the hardest march of my life. We walked for over eleven hours, with only one break at noon for about twenty minutes, over rocky hills, down deep gorges, through dry river beds, up hills again, between boulders, over sharp pebbles, uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill, until I felt that I could walk no more. When in the afternoon we reached the town of Al-Katana in the plains of Damascus, I was entirely worn out, my shoes were torn and my feet swollen. I wanted to stop overnight at the place, but my young friend advised strongly against it: there were too many French police around, and as it was a town and not a village, I would not so easily find shelter without attracting attention. The only alternative was to secure a ride in one of the automobiles that plied for hire between here and Damascus. I had still my twenty piasters (during the entire journey from Haifa I had had no need to spend a single penny): and twenty piasters happened to be the fare for a car ride to Damascus...



A few months earlier, in Jerusalem, I had met a Damascene teacher who had invited me to be his guest whenever I came to Damascus, and it was after his house that I now enquired. A little boy offered himself as my guide and took me by the hand...



Spurred by my new awareness, I spent much of my time at Damascus reading all manner of books on Islam on which I could lay my hands. My Arabic, although sufficient for the purposes of conversation, was as yet too weak for reading the Koran in the original, and so I had to take recourse to two translations — one French and the other German — which I borrowed from a library. For the rest, I had to rely on European orientalist works and on my friend's explanations.

However fragmentary, these studies and talks were like the lifting of a curtain. I began to discern a world of ideas of which hitherto I had been entirely ignorant.

Islam did not seem to be so much a religion in the popular sense of the word as, rather, a way of life; not so much a system of theology as a programme of personal and social behaviour based on the consciousness of God. Nowhere in the Koran could I find any reference to a need for 'salvation'. No original, inherited sin stood between the

individual and his destiny — for, *nothing shall be attributed to man but what he himself has striven for*. No asceticism was required to open a hidden gate to purity: for purity was man's birthright, and sin meant no more than a lapse from the innate, positive qualities with which God was said to have endowed every human being. There was no trace of any dualism in the consideration of man's nature: body and soul seemed to be taken as one integral whole.

At first I was somewhat startled by the Koran's concern not only with matters spiritual but also with many seemingly trivial, mundane aspects of life; but in time I began to understand that if man were indeed an integral unity of body and soul — as Islam insisted he was — no aspect of his life could be too 'trivial' to come within the purview of religion. With all this, the Koran never let its followers forget that the life of this world was only one stage of man's way to a higher existence, and that his ultimate goal was of a spiritual nature. Material prosperity, it said, is desirable but not an end in itself: and therefore man's appetites, though justified in themselves, must be restrained and controlled by moral consciousness. This consciousness ought to relate not merely to man's relation with God but also to his relations with men; not only to the spiritual perfection of the individual but also to the creation of such social conditions as might be conducive to the spiritual development of all, so that all might live in fullness...

All this was intellectually and ethically far more 'respectable' than anything I had previously heard or read about Islam. Its approach to the problems of the spirit seemed to be deeper than that of the Old Testament and had, moreover, none of the latter's predilection for one particular nation; and its approach to the problems of the flesh was, unlike the New Testament, strongly affirmative. Spirit and flesh stood, each in its own right, as the twin aspects of man's God-created life.

Was not perhaps this teaching, I asked myself, responsible for the emotional security I had so long sensed in the Arabs?...



The initial impact of crossing from the Arabian world back into Europe had been somewhat softened by the months spent in Turkey after I had left Syria in the autumn of 1923. Mustafa Kemal's Turkey had in those days not yet entered into its 'reformist', imitative phrase; it was still genuinely Turkish in its life and traditions and thus, because of the unifying bond of its Islamic faith, was still related to the general tenor of Arabian life: but Turkey's inner rhythm seemed somehow

heavier, less transparent, less airy — and more Occidental. When I travelled overland from Istanbul to Sofia and Belgrade there was no abrupt transition from East to West...⁴⁵

As I sat in the train that was taking me from Trieste to Vienna, my recent impressions of Turkey began to lose all their vividness and the only reality that remained was the eighteen months I had spent in Arab countries...

I stopped for a few weeks in Vienna and celebrated a reconciliation with my father. By now he had got over his anger at my abandonment of my university studies and the unceremonious manner in which I had left his roof. After all, I was not a correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung* — a name that people in Central Europe used to pronounce almost with awe in those days — and had thus justified my boastful claim that I would 'come out on top'.

From Vienna I proceeded straight to Frankfurt to present myself in person to the newspaper for which I had been writing for well over a year. I did this with a great deal of self-assurance, for the letters from Frankfurt had made it evident that my work was appreciated; and it was with a feeling of having definitely 'arrived' that I entered the sombre, old-fashioned edifice of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and sent up my card to the editor-in-chief, the internationally famous Dr. Heinrich Simon.⁴⁶

When I came in, he looked at me for a moment in speechless astonishment, almost forgetting to get up from his chair; but soon he regained his composure, rose and shook hands with me...

The discovery of my extreme youth seemed to have strengthened Dr. Simon's conviction that he had found in me a highly promising correspondent; and he fully agreed that I should return to the Middle East as soon as possible — the sooner the better. Financially, there was no longer any obstacle to such a plan, for the German inflation had at last been overcome and the stabilization of currency had brought almost immediately a wave of prosperity in its wake. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was once again in a position to finance the journeys of its special correspondents. Before I could go out again, however, I was expected to produce the book for which the newspaper had originally

⁴⁵ See for detail Windhager, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-143, mostly based on the information taken from Asad's *Unromantisches Morgenland* (1924) and his reports sent to *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

⁴⁶ Heinrich Simon (1880-1941). He also established a publishing house from where Asad's first book (cited above) came out.

contracted me; and it was decided that during this time I should be attached to the editorial office in order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the workings of a great newspaper.

Despite my impatience to go abroad again, those months in Frankfurt were tremendously stimulating. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was not just a large newspaper; it was almost a research institute. It employed about forty-five full-fledged editors, not counting the many sub editors and assistants in the newsrooms. The editorial work was highly specialized, with every area of the world and every major political or economic subject entrusted to an outstanding expert in his field; and this in pursuance of an old tradition that the articles and dispatches of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* should be not merely ephemeral reflections of passing events but, rather, a kind of documentary evidence which politicians and historians might draw upon. It was common knowledge that in the Foreign Office in Berlin the editorials and political analyses of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* were filed with the same reverence that was accorded the *notes verbales* of foreign governments. (In fact, Bismarck is quoted to have once said of the then chief of the newspaper's Berlin bureau, 'Dr. Stein is the Ambassador of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to the Court of Berlin.') To be a member of such an organization was very gratifying indeed to a man of my age; the more so as my hesitant views about the Middle East were met with serious attention by the editors and often became the subject of the daily editorial conferences; and the final triumph came on the day when I was asked to write an editorial on a current Middle Eastern problem...



While I worked on the editorial staff of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, I paid frequent visits to Berlin, where most of my friends resided; and it was on one of those trips that I met the woman who was later to become my wife.

From the moment I was introduced to Elsa⁴⁷ amidst the bustle

⁴⁷ Else Schiemann (7.1.1878, Hamburg—1927, Mecca), freelance painter of Berlin, belonged to the family of Schloss Reinbeck (Hamburg); in her youth she became close friend of Carl August Rathjens (1887-1966), a geographer, who toured South-West Arabia several times for his studies, therefore, she would have heard about Arabia before she met Asad; her paintings were published in a journal *Freie Strasse* (between 1915-1917); she was a widow when Asad married her and had a son named Heinrich Schiemann (1.9.1916—2002). (See Introduction and Photographs).

of the Romanisches Café, I was strongly attracted, not only by the delicate beauty of her appearance — her narrow, fine-boned face with its serious, deep-blue eyes and the sensitive mouth that bespoke humour and kindness — but even more by the inward, sensually intuitive quality of her approach to people and things. She was a painter. Her work, which I later came to know, may not have been outstanding, but it bore the same imprint of serene intensity that expressed itself in all her words and gestures. Although she was some fifteen⁴⁸ years older than I — that is, in her late thirties — her smooth face and slender, flexible body gave her a much younger appearance. She was probably the finest representative of the pure 'Nordic' type I have ever encountered, having all its clearness and sharpness of outline with none of the angularity and stolidity that so often goes with it. She descended from one of those old Holstein families which might be described as the North German equivalent of the English 'yeomanry'; but the unconventional freedom of her manner had caused the yeoman earthiness to give way to a quite un-Nordic warmth and flair. She was a widow and had a six-year-old son, to whom she was greatly devoted.

The attraction must have been mutual from the very outset, for after that first meeting we saw each other very often. Filled as I was with my recent impressions of the Arab world, I naturally communicated them to Elsa; and she, unlike most of my other friends, displayed an extraordinary understanding and sympathy for the strong but as yet inchoate feelings and ideas which these impressions had produced in me: so much so that when I wrote a kind of introduction to the book in which I was describing my Near Eastern travels, I felt as if I were addressing myself to her...



In the spring of 1924 the *Frankfurter Zeitung* sent me out on my second journey to the Middle East. The book describing my previous travels had at last been completed. (It was published a few months after my departure under the title *Unromantisches Morgenland*⁴⁹ — by which I meant to convey that it was not a book about the romantic, exotic outward picture of the Muslim East but rather an endeavour to penetrate to its day-by-day realities. Although its anti-Zionist attitude and unusual predilection for the Arabs caused something of a flutter in the German press, I am afraid it did not sell very well.

⁴⁸ Not fifteen, but thirteen as she was born in 1887.

⁴⁹ See Bibliography of Asad's writings.

Once again I crossed the Mediterranean and saw the coast of Egypt before me. The railway journey from Port Said to Cairo was like turning the leaves of a familiar book. Between the Suez Canal and Lake Manzala the Egyptian afternoon unfolded itself.



In accordance with my changed financial circumstances, I was now able to live in Cairo in a style which would have been unthinkable a few months earlier. I no longer needed to count pennies. The days when, during my first stay in this city, I had to subsist on bread, olives and milk, were forgotten. But in one respect I kept faith with the 'traditions' of my past: instead of putting up in one of the fashionable quarters of Cairo, I rented rooms in the house of my old friend, the fat woman from Trieste, who received me with open arms and a motherly kiss on both cheeks.

On the third day after my arrival, at sunset, I heard the muffled sound of cannon from the Citadel. At the same moment a circle of lights sprang up on the highest galleries of the two minarets that flanked the Citadel mosque: and all the minarets of all the mosques in the city took up that illumination and repeated it: on every minaret a similar circle of lights. Through old Cairo there went a strange movement, quicker and at the same time more festive became the step of the people, louder the polyphonous noise in the streets: you could sense and almost hear a new tension quiver at all corners.

And all this happened because the new crescent moon announced a new month (for the Islamic calendar goes by lunar months and years), and that month was Ramadan, the most solemn month of the Islamic year. It commemorates the time, more than thirteen hundred years ago, when, according to tradition, Muhammad received the first revelation of the Koran. Strict fasting is expected of every Muslim during this month. Men and women, save those who are ill, are forbidden to take food or drink (and even to smoke) from the moment when the first streak of light on the eastern horizon announces the coming dawn, until sunset: for thirty days. During these thirty days the people of Cairo went around with glowing eyes, as if elevated to holy regions. In the thirty nights you heard cannonfire, singing and cries of joy, while all the mosques glowed with light until daybreak.

Twofold, I learned, is the purpose of this month of fasting. One has to abstain from food and drink in order to feel in one's own body what the poor and hungry feel: thus, social responsibility is being

hammered into human consciousness as a religious postulate. The other purpose of fasting during Ramadan is self-discipline — an aspect of individual morality strongly accentuated in all Islamic teachings (as, for instance, in the total prohibition of all intoxicants, which Islam regards as too easy an avenue of escape from consciousness and responsibility). In these two elements—brotherhood of man and individual self-discipline — I began to discern the outlines of Islam's ethical outlook.

In my endeavour to gain a fuller picture of what Islam really meant and stood for, I derived great benefit from the explanations which some of my Cairene Muslims friends were able to provide me. Outstanding among them was Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi,⁵⁰ one of the most prominent Islamic scholars of the time and certainly the most brilliant among the *'ulama* of Al-Azhar University (he was destined to become its rector some years later). He must have been in his middle forties at that time, but his stocky, muscular body had the alertness and vivacity of a twenty-year-old. In spite of his erudition and gravity, his sense of humour never left him. A pupil of the great Egyptian reformer Muhammad 'Abduh,⁵¹ and having associated in his youth with that inspiring firebrand, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani,⁵² Shaykh Al-Maraghi was himself a keen, critical thinker. He never failed to impress upon me that the Muslims of recent times had fallen very short indeed of the ideals of their faith, and that nothing could be more erroneous than to measure the potentialities of Muhammad's message by the yardstick of present-day Muslim life and thought...

Out of the crowded bustle of Mousky Street, Cairo's oldest shopping centre, we reached a small, out-of-the-way square, one of its sides occupied by the broad, straight front of the Azhar Mosque. Through a double gate and a shadowy forecourt we entered the courtyard of the mosque proper, a large quadrangle surrounded by ancient arcades. Students dressed in long, dark *jubbas* and white turbans were sitting on straw mats and reading with low voices from their books and manuscripts. The lectures were given in the huge, covered mosque-hall beyond. Several teachers sat, also on straw mats, under the pillars which crossed the hall in long rows, and in a semicircle before each teacher crouched a group of students. The lecturer never raised his voice, so that it obviously required great attention and concentration not

⁵⁰ Shaikh Muhammad Mustafa al-Marāghī (1881-1945). Egyptian reformer and Rector of Al-Azhar University (1928-1929 and 1935-1945).

⁵¹ Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905).

⁵² Jamal-ud-Din al-Afghani (1838/9-1897).

to miss any of his words. One should have thought that such absorption would be conducive to real scholarship; but Shaykh Al-Maraghi soon shattered my illusions...



The new insight I had gained, and the progress I was making in the Arabic language (I had arranged for a student of Al-Azhar to give me daily lessons), made me feel that now at last I possessed something like a key to the Muslim mind. No longer was I so certain that a European 'could never consciously grasp the total picture', as I had written in my book only a few months earlier; for now this Muslim world no longer seemed so entirely alien to Western associations. It occurred to me that if one was able to achieve a certain degree of detachment from his own past habits of thought and allow for the possibility that they might not be the only valid ones, the once so strange Muslim world might indeed become graspable...

But although I found much in Islam that appealed to my intellect as well as to my instincts, I did not consider it desirable for an intelligent man to conform all his thinking and his entire view of life to a system not devised by himself...

In the early summer of 1924 I started out from Cairo on a long wandering which was to take the better part of two years. For almost two years I trekked through countries old in the wisdom of their traditions but eternally fresh in their effect on my mind. I travelled leisurely, with long halts. I revisited Transjordan and spent some days with Amir 'Abdullah, revelling in the warm virility of that beduin land which had not yet been forced to adapt its character to the stream of Western influences. As this time a French visa had been arranged for me by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, I was able to see Syria again. Damascus came and went. The Levantine liveliness of Beirut embraced me for a short while soon to be forgotten in the out-of-the-way sleepiness of Syrian Tripoli with its air of silent happiness. Small, old-fashioned sailing ships were rocking on their moorings in the open port, their Latin masts creaking softly. On low stools before a coffeehouse on the quay sat the burghers of Tripoli, relishing their cup of coffee and their *nargiles* in the afternoon sun. Everywhere peace and contentment and apparently enough to eat; and even the beggars seemed to enjoy themselves in the warm sun, as if saying, 'Oh, how good it is to be a beggar in Tripoli!'

I came to Aleppo. Its streets and buildings reminded me of Jerusalem: old stone houses that appeared to have grown out of the soil,

dark, arched passageways, silent squares and courtyards, carved windows. The inner life of Aleppo, however, was entirely different from that of Jerusalem. The dominant mood of Jerusalem had been the strange side-by-side of conflicting national currents, like a painful, complicated cramp; next to a world of contemplation and deep religious emotion there had brooded, like a cloud of poison, an almost mystical hatred over people and things. But Aleppo — although a mixture of Arabian and Levantine, with a hint of nearby Turkey — was harmonious and serene. The houses with their stony façades and wooden balconies were alive even in their stillness. The quiet industriousness of the artisans in the ancient bazaar; the courtyards of the many old caravanserais with their arcades and loggias full of bales of goods; frugality together with gay covetousness, and both free from all envy; the absence of all hurry, a restfulness which embraced the stranger and made him wish that his own life were rooted in restfulness: all this flowed together in a strong, winning melody.

From Aleppo I went by car to Dayr az-Zor, a little town in northernmost Syria, whence I intended to proceed to Baghdad on the old caravan route parallel to the Euphrates; and it was on that journey that I first met Zayd...

Next morning we left Dayr az-Zor. The great Hammada Desert opened itself up to the wheels of our Model T Ford: an unending plain of gravel, sometimes smooth and level like asphalt and sometimes stretching in waves from horizon to horizon...

* * * * *

At noon of the third day we reached the first Iraqi village — Ana on the Euphrates — and rode for hours between its palm orchards and mud walls...

* * * * *

The following day I arrived at Hit, a little town on the Euphrates, at the point where the old caravan road from Damascus to Baghdad emerges from the desert...

* * * * *

It was noon of the fifth day of the car journey from Aleppo when I caught my first view of the widespread oasis of Baghdad. From between the crowns of myriads of palms shone a gilded mosque cupola and a tall minaret...

Of its former magnificence and splendour nothing remained in Baghdad. The Mongol invasions of the Middle Ages had destroyed the city so thoroughly that nothing was left to remind one of the old capital of Harun ar-Rashid. What remained was a dreary city of haphazardly built brick dwellings...

In the early twenties automobiles were still comparatively rare in Iran, and only a few cars plied for hire between the main centres. If one wanted to leave the three or four trunk roads, one had to depend on horse-driven vehicles; and even these could not go everywhere, for there were many parts of Iran where no roads existed at all. For someone like me, avid to meet the people of the land on their own terms, travel on horseback was clearly indicated. And so, during my last week in Baghdad, assisted by Ibrahim, I attended every morning the horse market outside the city. After days of negotiations, I purchased a horse for myself and a mule for Ibrahim. My mount was a beautiful chestnut stallion of South-Iranian breed, while the mule — a lively, obstinate animal with muscles like steel cables under a grey velvet skin — had obviously come from Turkey; it would easily carry, apart from its rider, the large saddlebags in which I was to keep all my personal necessities.

Riding my horse and leading the mule by the halter, Ibrahim set out one morning toward Khaniqin, the last Iraqi town on the Iranian frontier and terminus of a branch line of the Baghdad Railway; and I followed two days later by train, to meet him there.

We left Khaniqin and the Arabian world behind us...

In the afternoon we reached a Kurdish tent village that lay softly tucked between hilly slopes. The tents resembled those of beduin half-nomads in Syria or Iraq...



In time, Kurdistan receded into the past. For nearly eighteen months I wandered through the length and breadth of that strangest of all lands, Iran. I came to know a nation that combined in itself the wisdom of thirty centuries of culture and the volatile unpredictability of children; a nation that could look with a lazy irony at itself and all that happened around it — and a moment later could tremble in wild, volcanic passions...

For over six months I rode on through the wild mountains and steppes of Afghanistan: six months in a world where the arms which every man carried were not meant for ornament, and where every word and every step had to be watched lest a bullet should come singing

through the air. Sometimes Ibrahim and I and our occasional companions had to defend our lives against bandits, of whom Afghanistan was full in those days; but if it happened to be Friday, bandits held out no threat, for they considered it shameful to rob and kill on the day set aside for the worship of the Lord. Once, near Kandahar, I narrowly missed being shot because I had inadvertently looked upon the uncovered face of a pretty village woman working in the field; while among the Mongol villagers in the high gorges of the Hindu-Kush — descendants of the warrior hosts of Jinghiz Khan — it was not regarded as unseemly to let me sleep on the floor of the one-room but side by side with the host's young wife and sisters. For weeks I was guest of Amanullah Khan, King of Afghanistan, in his capital, Kabul; for long nights I discussed with his learned men the teachings of the Koran; and on the other nights I discussed with Pathan *khans* in their black tents how best to circumvent areas engaged in intertribal warfare.

And with every day of those two years in Iran and Afghanistan the certainty grew in me that I was approaching some final answer...

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It was at this time that I married Elsa. The two years I had been away from Europe had not weakened our love but rather strengthened it, and it was with a happiness I had never felt before that I brushed aside her apprehensions about the great difference in our ages...

I did not exaggerate when I said that I could not imagine a future without Elsa. Her beauty and her instinctive grace made her so utterly attractive to me that I could not even look at any other woman; and her sensitive understanding of what I wanted of life illumined my own hopes and desires and made them more concrete, more graspable than my own thinking could ever have done...

But Elsa was not really puzzled. She knew what I was searching for when I spoke to her of Islam; and although she may not have felt the same urgency as I did, her love made her share my quest...

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It would not be too much to say that at this period of my life the problem of Islam — for it was a problem to me — occupied my mind to the exclusion of everything else. By now my absorption had outgrown its initial stages, when it had been no more than an intellectual interest in a strange, if attractive, ideology and culture: it had become a

passionate search for truth. Compared with this search, even the adventurous excitement of the last two years of travel paled into insignificance: so much so that it became difficult for me to concentrate on writing the new book which the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was entitled to expect of me.

At first Dr. Simon viewed indulgently my obvious reluctance to proceed with this book. After all, I had just returned from a long journey and deserved some sort of holiday; my recent marriage seemed also to warrant a respite from the routine of writing. But when the holiday and the respite began to extend beyond what Dr. Simon regarded as reasonable, he suggested that I should now come down to earth.

In retrospect, it seems to me that he was very understanding; but it did not seem so at the time. His frequent and urgent inquiries about the progress of 'the book' had an effect contrary to what he intended: I felt myself unduly imposed upon; and I began to detest the very thought of the book. I was more concerned with what I had still to discover than with describing what I had found so far.

In the end, Dr. Simon made the exasperated observation: 'I don't think you will ever write this book. What you are suffering from is *horror libri*.'

Somewhat nettled, I replied: 'Maybe my disease is even more serious than that. Perhaps I am suffering from *horror scribendi*.'

'Well, if you're suffering from that,' he retorted sharply, 'do you think the *Frankfurter Zeitung* is the proper place for you?'

One word led to another and our disagreement grew into a quarrel. On the same day I resigned from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and a week later left with Elsa for Berlin.

I did not, of course, intend to give up journalism, for, apart from the comfortable livelihood and the pleasure (temporarily marred by 'the book') which writing gave me, it provided me with my only means of returning to the Muslim world: and to the Muslim world I wanted to return at any cost. But with the reputation I had achieved over the past four years, it was not difficult to make new press connections. Very soon after my break with Frankfurt, I concluded highly satisfactory agreements with three other newspapers: the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of Zürich, the *Telegraaf* of Amsterdam and the *Kölnische Zeitung* of Cologne. From now on my articles on the Middle East were to be syndicated by these three newspapers, which — though perhaps not comparable with the *Frankfurter Zeitung* — were among the most important in Europe.

For the time being Elsa and I settled down in Berlin, where I intended to complete my series of lectures at the Academy of Geopolitics⁵³ and also to continue my Islamic studies.

My old literary friends were glad to see me back, but somehow it was not easy to take up the threads of our former relations at the point where they had been left dangling when I went to the Middle East. We had grown estranged; we no longer spoke the same intellectual language. In particular, from none of my friends could I elicit anything like understanding for my preoccupation with Islam. Almost to a man they shook their heads in puzzlement when I tried to explain to them that Islam, as an intellectual and social concept, could favourably compare with any other ideology. Although on occasion they might concede the reasonableness of this or that Islamic proposition, most of them were of the opinion that the old religions were a thing of the past, and that our time demanded a new, 'humanistic' approach. But even those who did not so sweepingly deny all validity to institutional religion were by no means disposed to give up the popular Western notion that Islam, being overtly concerned with mundane matters, lacked the 'mystique' which one had a right to expect from religion.

It rather surprised me to discover that the very aspect of Islam which had attracted me in the first instance — the absence of a division of reality into physical and spiritual compartments and the stress on reason as a way to faith — appealed so little to intellectuals who otherwise were wont to claim for reason a dominant role in life: it was in the religious sphere alone that they instinctively receded from their habitually so 'rational' and 'realistic' position. And in this respect I could discern no difference whatever between those few of my friends who were religiously inclined and the many to whom religion had ceased to be more than an outmoded convention.

In time, however, I came to understand where their difficulty lay. I began to perceive that in the eyes of people brought up within the orbit of Christian thought — with its stress on the 'supernatural' allegedly inherent in every true religious experience — a predominantly rational approach appeared to detract from a religion's spiritual value.

⁵³ The original name of this Academy was "Berliner Hochschule für Geopolitik" and it was established by Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), see Frank Eberling: *Geopolitik, Karl Haushofer und seine Raumwissenschaft 1919-1945*. Berlin 1994. In this Academy's journal, *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, Asad contributed an article, "Zwischen Nedschd und Irak," published in two instalments (January 1930, pp. 58-67, February 1930, pp. 135-143), see Windhager, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-173.

This attitude was by no means confined to believing Christians. Because of Europe's long, almost exclusive association with Christianity, even the agnostic European had subconsciously learned to look upon all religious experience through the lens of Christian concepts, and would regard it as 'valid' only if it was accompanied by a thrill of numinous awe before things hidden and beyond intellectual comprehension. Islam did not fulfill this requirement: it insisted on a co-ordination of the physical and spiritual aspects of life on a perfectly natural plane. In fact, its world-view was so different from the Christian, on which most of the West's ethical concepts were based, that to accept the validity of the one inescapably led to questioning the validity of the other.

As for myself, I knew now that I was being driven to Islam; but a last hesitancy made me postpone the final, irrevocable step. The thought of embracing Islam was like the prospect of venturing out onto a bridge that spanned an abyss between two different worlds: a bridge so long that one would have to reach the point of no return before the other end became visible. I was well aware that if I became a Muslim I would have to cut myself off from the world in which I had grown up. No other outcome was possible. One could not really follow the call of Muhammad and still maintain one's inner links with a society that was ruled by diametrically opposed concepts. But — *was Islam truly a message from God or merely the wisdom of a great, but fallible, man...?...*



One day — it was in September 1926 - Elsa and I found ourselves travelling in the Berlin subway. It was an upper-class compartment. My eye fell casually on a well-dressed man opposite me, apparently a well-to-do businessman, with a beautiful briefcase on his knees and a large diamond ring on his hand. I thought idly how well the portly figure of this man fitted into the picture of prosperity which one encountered everywhere in Central Europe in those days: a prosperity the more prominent as it had come after years of inflation, when all economic life had been topsy-turvy and shabbiness of appearance the rule. Most of the people were now well dressed and well fed, and the man opposite me was therefore no exception. But when I looked at his face, I did not seem to be looking at a happy face. He appeared to be worried: and not merely worried but acutely unhappy, with eyes staring vacantly ahead and the corners of his mouth drawn in as if in pain — but not in bodily pain. Not wanting to be rude, I turned my eyes away and saw next to him a lady of some elegance. She also had a strangely

unhappy expression on her face, as if contemplating or experiencing something that caused her pain; nevertheless, her mouth was fixed in the stiff semblance of a smile which, I was certain, must have been habitual. And then I began to look around at all the other faces in the compartment — faces belonging without exception to well-dressed, well-fed people: and in almost every one of them I could discern an expression of hidden suffering, so hidden that the owner of the face seemed to be quite unaware of it.

This was indeed strange. I had never before seen so many unhappy faces around me: or was it perhaps that I had never before looked for what was now so loudly speaking in them? The impression was so strong that I mentioned it to Elsa; and she too began to look around her with the careful eyes of a painter accustomed to study human features. Then she turned to me, astonished, and said: 'You are right. They all look as though they were suffering torments of hell... I wonder, do they know themselves what is going on in them?'

I knew that they did not — for otherwise they could not go on wasting their lives as they did, without any faith in binding truths, without any goal beyond the desire to raise their own 'standard of living', without any hopes other than having more material amenities, more gadgets, and perhaps more power . . .

When we returned home, I happened to glance at my desk on which lay open a copy of the Koran I had been reading earlier. Mechanically, I picked the book up to put it away, but just as I was about to close it, my eye fell on the open page before me, and I read:

*You are obsessed by greed for more and more
Until you go down to your graves.
Nay, but you will come to know!
Nay, but you will come to know!
Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty,
You would indeed see the hell you are in.
In time, indeed, you shall see it with the eye of certainty:
And on that Day you will be asked what you have done with the boon of
life.*

For a moment I was speechless. I think the book shook in my hands. Then I handed it to Elsa. 'Read this. Is it not an answer to what we saw in the subway?'

It was an answer: an answer so decisive that all doubt was

suddenly at an end. I knew now, beyond any doubt, that it was a God-inspired book I was holding in my hand: for although it had been placed before man over thirteen centuries ago, it clearly anticipated something that could have become true only in this complicated, mechanized, phantom-ridden age of ours.

At all times people had known greed: but at no time before this had greed outgrown a mere eagerness to acquire things and become an obsession that blurred the sight of everything else: an irresistible craving to get, to do, to contrive more and more — more today than yesterday, and more tomorrow than today: a demon riding on the necks of men and whipping their hearts forward toward goals that tauntingly glitter in the distance but dissolve into contemptible nothingness as soon as they are reached, always holding out the promise of new goal ahead — goals still more brilliant, more tempting as long as they lie on the horizon, and bound to wither into further nothingness as soon as they come within grasp: and that hunger, that insatiable hunger for ever new goals gnawing at man's soul: *Nay, if you but knew it you would see the hell you are in...*

This, I saw, was not the mere human wisdom of a man of a distant past in distant Arabia. However wise he may have been, such a man could not by himself have foreseen the torment so peculiar to this twentieth century. Out of the Koran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad...⁵⁴



In the first days of January 1927, I set out again, this time accompanied by Elsa and her little son, for the Middle East; and this time, I sensed, it would be for good.

For days we voyaged through the Mediterranean, through a shimmering circle of sea and sky, sometimes greeted by distant coasts and by the smoke of ships that glided past. Europe had disappeared far behind us and was almost forgotten...



Before sunrise on the second morning the sandy plain narrowed, the hills grew closer together; we passed through a gorge and saw in the pale light of dawn the first buildings of Mecca; then we entered the streets of the Holy City with the rising sun.

The houses resembled those in Jidda with their carved oriel

⁵⁴ For Asad's conversion in Berlin and then in Cairo, see Introduction.

windows and enclosed balconies; but the stone of which they were built seemed to be heavier, more massive than the light-coloured coral stone of Jidda. It was still very early in the morning, but already a thick, brooding heat was growing. Before many of the houses stood benches on which exhausted men were sleeping. Narrower and narrower became the unpaved streets through which our rocking caravan moved toward the centre of the city. As only a few days remained before the festival of the *hajj*, the crowds in the streets were very large. Innumerable pilgrims in the white *ihram*, and others who had temporarily changed again into their everyday clothes — clothes from all countries of the Muslim world; water carriers bent under heavy waterskins or under a yoke weighted by two old petroleum cans used as buckets; donkey drivers and riding-donkeys with tinkling bells and gay trappings; and, to make the confusion complete, camels coming from the opposite direction, loaded with empty litters and bellowing in various tones. There was such a hubbub in the narrow streets that you might have thought the *hajj* was not a thing that had taken place annually for centuries but a surprise for which the people had not been prepared. In the end our caravan ceased to be a caravan and became a disorderly tangle of camels, litters, baggage, pilgrims, camel drivers and noise.

I had arranged from Jidda to stay in the house of a well-known *mutawwif*, or pilgrim's guide, by name of Hasan Abid, but there seemed to be little chance of finding him or his house in this chaos. But suddenly someone shouted, 'Hasan Abid! Where are you pilgrims for Hasan Abid?' - and, like a jinn from out of a bottle, a young man appeared before us and, with a deep bow, requested that we follow him; he had been sent by Hasan Abid to lead us to his house.

After an opulent breakfast served by the *mutawwif*, I went out, led by the same young man who had received us earlier, to the Holy Mosque. We walked through the teeming, buzzing streets, past butcher shops with rows of skinned sheep hanging before them; past vegetable vendors with their goods spread on straw mats on the ground; amidst swarms of flies and the smell of vegetables, dust and perspiration; then through a narrow, covered bazaar in which only clothiers had their shops: a festival of colour. As elsewhere in the bazaars of Western Asia and North Africa, the shops were only niches about one yard above ground level, with the shopkeeper sitting cross-legged, surrounded by his bolts of cloth of all materials and colours, while above him there hung in rows all manner of dress articles for all the nations of the Muslim world.

And, again, there were people of all races and garbs and expressions, some with turbans and others bareheaded; some who walked silently with lowered heads, perhaps with a rosary in their hands, and others who were running on light feet through the crowds; supple, brown bodies of Somalis, shining like copper from between the folds of their toga-like garments; Arabs from the highlands of the interior, lean figures, narrow of face, proud of bearing; heavy-limbed, thickset Uzbeks from Bokhara, who even in this Meccan heat had kept to their quilted *kaftans* and knee-high leather boots; sarong-clad Javanese girls with open faces and almond-shaped eyes; Moroccans, slow of stride and dignified in their white *burnuses*; Meccans in white tunics, their heads covered with ridiculously small white skullcaps; Egyptian *fellahin* with excited faces; white-clad Indians with black eyes peering from under voluminous, snow-white turbans, and Indian women so impenetrably shrouded in their white *burqas* that they looked like walking tents; huge Fullata Negroes from Timbuktu or Dahomey in indigo-blue robes and red skullcaps; and petite Chinese ladies, like embroidered butterflies, tripping along on minute, bound feet that resembled the hooves of gazelles. A shouting, thronging commotion in all directions, so that you felt you were in the midst of breaking waves of which you could grasp some details but never an integrated picture. Everything floated amid a buzz of innumerable languages, hot gestures and excitement — until we found ourselves, suddenly, before one of the gates of the *Haram*, the Holy Mosque.

It was a triple-arched gate with stone steps climbing up to it; on the threshold sat a half-naked Indian beggar, stretching his emaciated hand toward us. And then I saw for the first time the inner square of the sanctuary, which lay below the level of the street — much lower than the threshold — and thus opened itself to the eye like a bowl: a huge quadrangle surrounded on all sides by many-pillared cloisters with semicircular arches, and in its centre a cube about forty feet high, draped in black, with a broad band of gold-embroidered verses from the Koran running around the upper portion of the covering: the Kaaba . . .

This, then, was the Kaaba, the goal of longing for so many millions of people for so many centuries. To reach this goal, countless pilgrims had made heavy sacrifices throughout the ages; many had died on the way; many had reached it only after great privations; and to all of them this small, square building was the apex of their desires, and to reach it meant fulfillment.

There it stood, almost a perfect cube (as its Arabic name

connotes) entirely covered with black brocade, a quiet island in the middle of the vast quadrangle of the mosque: much quieter than any other work of architecture anywhere in the world. It would almost appear that he who first built the Kaaba — for since the time of Abraham the original structure has been rebuilt several times in the same shape — wanted to create a parable of man's humility before God. The builder knew that no beauty of architectural rhythm and no perfection of line, however great, could ever do justice to the idea of God: and so he confined himself to the simplest three-dimensional form imaginable — a cube of stone.

I had seen in various Muslim countries mosques in which the hands of great artists had created inspired works of art. I had seen mosques in North Africa, shimmering prayer-palaces of marble and white alabaster; the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a powerfully perfect cupola over a delicate understructure, a dream of lightness and heaviness united without contradiction; and the majestic buildings of Istanbul, the Sulaymaniyya, the Yeni-Valide, the Bayazid Mosque; and those of Brussa, in Asia Minor; and the Safavid mosques in Iran—royal harmonies of stone, multicoloured majolica tiles, mosaics, huge stalacite portals over silver-embossed doors, slender minarets with alabaster and turquoise-blue galleries, marble-covered quadrangles with fountains and age-old plantain trees; and the mighty ruins of Tamerlane's mosques in Samarkand, splendid even in their decay.

All these had I seen — but never had I felt so strongly as now, before the Kaaba, that the hand of the builder had come so close to his religious conception. In the utter simplicity of a cube, in the complete renunciation of all beauty of line and form, spoke this thought: 'Whatever beauty man may be able to create with his hands, it will be only conceit to deem it worthy of God; therefore, the simplest that man can conceive is the greatest that he can do to express the glory of God.' A similar feeling may have been responsible for the mathematical simplicity of the Egyptian pyramids — although there man's conceit had at least found a vent in the tremendous dimensions he gave to his buildings. But here, in the Kaaba, even the size spoke of human renunciation and self-surrender; and the proud modesty of this little structure had no compare on earth.

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There is only one entrance into the Kaaba—a silver-sheathed door on the northeast side, about seven feet above ground level, so that

it can only be reached by means of a movable wooden staircase which is placed before the door on a few days of the year. The interior, usually closed (I saw it only on later occasions), is very simple: a marble floor with a few carpets and lamps of bronze and silver hanging from a roof that is supported by heavy wooden beams. Actually, this interior has no special significance of its own, for the sanctity of the Kaaba applies to the whole building, which is the *qibla* — that is, the direction of prayer— for the entire Islamic world. It is toward this symbol of God's Oneness that hundreds of millions of Muslims the world over turn their faces in prayer five times a day.

Embedded in the eastern corner of the building and left uncovered is a dark-coloured stone surrounded by a broad silver frame. This Black Stone, which has been kissed hollow by many generations of pilgrims, has been the cause of much misunderstanding among non-Muslims, who believe it to be a fetish taken over by Muhammad as a concession to the pagan Meccans. Nothing could be farther from truth. Just as the Kaaba is an object of reverence but not of worship, so too is the Black Stone. It is revered as the only remnant of Abraham's original building; and because the lips of Muhammad touched it on his Farewell Pilgrimage, all pilgrims have done the same ever since. The Prophet was well aware that all the later generations of the Faithful would always follow his example: and when he kissed the stone he knew that on it the lips of future pilgrims would forever meet the memory of his lips in the symbolic embrace he thus offered, beyond time and beyond death, to his entire community. And the pilgrims, when they kiss the Black Stone, feel that they are embracing the Prophet and all the other Muslims who have been here before them and those who will come after them.

No Muslim would deny that the Kaaba had existed long before the Prophet Muhammad; indeed, its significance lies precisely in this fact. The Prophet did not claim to be the founder of a new religion. On the contrary: self-surrender to God—*Islam*—has been, according to the Koran, 'man's natural inclination' since the dawn of human consciousness; it was this that Abraham and Moses and Jesus and all the other Prophets of God had been teaching — the message of the Koran being but the last of the Divine Revelations. Nor would a Muslim deny that the sanctuary had been full of idols and fetishes before Muhammad broke them, just as Moses had broken the golden calf at Sinai: for, long before the idols were brought into the Kaaba, the True God had been worshipped there, and thus Muhammad did no more than restore Abraham's temple to its original purpose.



And there I stood before the temple of Abraham and gazed at the marvel without thinking (for thoughts and reflections came only much later), and out of some hidden, smiling kernel within me there slowly grew an elation like a song.

Smooth marble slabs, with sunlight reflections dancing upon them, covered the ground in a wide circle around the Kaaba, and over these marble slabs walked many people, men and women, round and round the black-draped House of God. Among them were some who wept, some who loudly called to God in prayer, and many who had no words and no tears but could only walk with lowered heads . . .

It is part of the *hajj* to walk seven times around the Kaaba: not just to show respect to the central sanctuary of Islam but to recall to oneself the basic demand of Islamic life. The Kaaba is a symbol of God's Oneness; and the pilgrim's bodily movement around it is a symbolic expression of human activity, implying that not only our thoughts and feelings — all that is comprised in the term 'inner life' — but also our outward, active life, our doings and practical endeavours must have God as their centre.

And I, too, moved slowly forward and became part of the circular flow around the Kaaba. Off and on I became conscious of a man or woman near me; isolated pictures appeared fleetingly before my eyes and vanished. There was a huge Negro in a white *ihram*, with a wooden rosary slung like a chain around a powerful, black wrist. An old Malay tripped along by my side for a while, his arms dangling, as if in helpless confusion, against his batik sarong. A grey eye under bushy brows — to whom did it belong? — and now lost in the crowd. Among the many people in front of the Black Stone, a young Indian woman: she was obviously ill; in her narrow, delicate face lay a strangely open yearning, visible to the onlooker's eye like the life of fishes and algae in the depths of a crystal-clear pond. Her hands with their pale, upturned palms were stretched out toward the Kaaba, and her fingers trembled as if in accompaniment to a wordless prayer. . .

I walked on and on, the minutes passed, all that had been small and bitter in my heart began to leave my heart, I became part of a circular stream — oh, was this the meaning of what we were doing: to become aware that one is a part of a movement in an orbit? Was this, perhaps, all confusion's end? And the minutes dissolved, and time itself stood still, and this was the centre of the universe . . .



Nine days later Elsa died.

She died suddenly, after less than a week's illness which at first had seemed to be no more than an indisposition due to heat and the unusual diet, but later turned out to be an obscure tropical ailment before which the Syrian doctors at the hospital of Mecca stood helpless. Darkness and utter despair closed around me.

She was buried in the sandy graveyard of Mecca. A stone was placed over her grave. I did not want any inscription on it; thinking of an inscription was like thinking of the future: and I could not conceive of any future now.

Elsa's little son, Ahmad, remained with me for over a year and accompanied me on my first journey into the interior of Arabia—a valiant, ten-year-old companion. But after a time I had to say good-bye to him as well, for his mother's family finally persuaded me that he must be sent to school in Europe;⁵⁵ then nothing remained of Elsa except her memory and a stone in a Meccan graveyard and a darkness that was not lifted until long afterward, long after I had given myself up to the timeless embrace of Arabia...

I turn around in my saddle and see behind me the waving, weaving mass of thousands of white-clad riders and, beyond them, the bridge over which I have come: its end is just behind me while its beginning is already lost in the mists of distance...

This, then, is the story of my road to Mecca: the story of the home-coming of my heart, as I began to understand it during those distant days in the late summer of 1932, when we rode, rode, two men on two dromedaries, from the northern confines of Arabia towards the south.

'Home-coming of the heart':⁵⁶ this phase always echoes in my mind whenever I think of those Arabian years and of the greeting *ahlan wa-sahlan* — 'welcome home' — which I so often heard from Arab lips. I heard it in the library of the Great Mosque in Mecca, in the spring of 1927, when I was introduced to Amir Faysal, that princely son of the

⁵⁵ Heinrich (Ahmad) Schiemann corresponded with Windhager in 1997 and provided useful information about his mother and step-father (Asad). He died in November 2002 (cf. *Der Wisch* (Vienna), March 2005, p. 9). In 1997, he spent a few months in Pakistan.

⁵⁶ The title of the forthcoming book of Asad, covering the period after *The Road to Mecca*. The script is in the possession of his wife, Pola.

family which over the years was to become almost a family to me as well. And it was with the same greeting that I was received on the following day by his father, the legendary King Ibn Saud, who in time would address me as 'my son'. . . .

The words *ahlan wa-sahlan* went on echoing within me as the years rolled by, long after the Arabian years had sunk into the past and disappeared behind the western horizon of the Arabian Sea. By then, the soil of India was under my feet, and the dust of India had replaced the desert-clear air of Arabia; for a dream had called out to me — a dream that demanded fulfillment and was in the end, despite all its shortcomings, fulfilled by the creation of an Islamic state called Pakistan.

The years which I spent working for and in Pakistan belong to another story, which I may, perhaps, narrate at another time. But these two main streams of my life coalesced once again when I returned to Arabia in 1951, after an absence of more than eighteen years, and looked up once again at the starry Arabian sky on my way from Jidda to Mecca: this time in a fast car flying the Pakistani flag, over a brand-new, macadamized highway which covered the countless tracks made by camels and donkeys and sandalled pilgrims over more than a thousand years. I was coming to Saudia Arabia as an emissary of the government of Pakistan — and yet, it was a new home-coming of the heart.

The next morning I paid my 'official' visit to King Ibn Saud, feeling somewhat strange — almost out of place — in my Pakistani *achkan* and black fur cap: for although this kind of clothing is and has always been quite common in cosmopolitan Mecca, it was the first time that I wore in Arabia anything but Arabian dress. As it happened, almost the first person whom I met in the royal palace was Prince Faysal — eighteen years older than when I had seen him last, bearded now, but a slim and seemingly shy as he had always been, standing alone, just within the door of the King's huge reception room, ready to welcome his father's guests.

I stopped before him and said, 'Peace be upon thee, O Long-of-Age! Thou wilt have forgotten me...'

He looked up, and stared at me blankly for the fraction of a second; then his eyes lit up, and he stretched out both his hands and exclaimed, '*Ahlan wa-sahlan*: thou hast come home to thy family, and may thy step be easy! How could I have forgotten thee!'

And then he took me by the hand and, as his father had so often done in bygone years, walked with me, slowly, up and down the long gallery, always holding me by the hand and inquiring as to how life had

dealt with me since I had left Arabia; and it was as easy and simple to talk to him as if we had parted but yesterday: for, simplicity of manner and modesty of behaviour have always been the most obvious traits of Faysal's personality, whatever his age and circumstance — in Faysal the beardless prince of my early days in Mecca and Taif, who with quiet dignity would preside over a meeting of great bedouin chieftains, and then would leap onto his horse and challenge his guests and the men of his and their bodyguards to a neck-breaking race; and Faysal the leader of armies in the war against Yemen in 1934, who in the evenings, after a strenuous march, would sit on the sand by a camp-fire, leaning on his camel-saddle, and would listen to the songs and the personal stories and the hopes and the griefs of his bedouin warriors; and, in his middle age, after the old King's death, Faysal the powerful Prime Minister, who would ride in his car by the side of his chauffeur, without bodyguard and without pomp; and finally — and now — Faysal the King of Arabia, the wisest, most farsighted and most respected ruler in all the Arab world, who still likes to drive in a well-used car side by side with his chauffeur, and refuses to live in the palaces which his predecessor had built, preferring to stay on in the unassuming houses in which he lived in earlier years: the King who, like his father before him, despises flattery and disdains all court ceremonial — simply because he has no need to remind the world, and himself, that he is a king ...

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As I lay down my pen, I gaze at the two photographs on the wall before me: King Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud and King Faysal his son: two kings, two men, two epochs: the vanished Arabia of millennial solitude, strong in its faith and simple in its ways — and the Arabia of the oil wells, projecting its existence and its uncertainties into a wholly incalculable future.

Two kings, two epochs...and above all that question for which as yet no answer has been found: How will Arab life — Muslim life — fare and develop in this century dominated by technology, the technology of other peoples' making...?

Tangier 1973

(cf. *The Road to Mecca*. By Muhammad Asad. Louisville, KY: Fon Vitae, 1993, paperback: Reprinted: 4th rev. ed., 1980: Dar al-Andalus).

Muhammad Asad

THE ROAD TO MECCA



The Road to Mecca. Reprinted: 2000

POLA HAMIDA ASAD

**[MUHAMMAD ASAD—
AN UNUSUAL MUSLIM]**

When, on the first day of November 1952, I moved into my husband's apartment in New York and began my new life with that extraordinary man, I learned, almost immediately, of his primary fault, which he has carried with him from his cradle and will probably carry to the grave: a total lack of vanity. Now, vanity is considered to be a fault—and when taken to the extreme, even a sin—in our Muslim religion as well as in most of the other great religions of the world; and so you may well ask, "How can you criticise the man you married, and with whom you have collaborated in his work throughout all the thirty-three years of your life with him, and whose religion and points of view you share both intellectually and emotionally: how can you criticise him for possessing a quality in which you should take pride?" And my well-thought-out answer is this, albeit an unconventional one: I am convinced through my experiences of people and of life itself that one is almost invariably taken at one's own valuation, so to speak, and thus the man of vanity is usually taken much more seriously than the man without it: simply because normal, unthinking people do take a person at his face value. And in a writer, in particular, this virtue might be a fault.

My very first experience in this regard was this. Only a week after our marriage, my new husband, Muhammad Asad, was requested by Dr. Schuyler Wallace, Director, I believe, of something called "The School of Oriental Affairs" (I do not remember the exact title) in New York, to give a long talk about Islam and the then-current problems of the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, and afterwards to answer the avid (or so he hoped) questions of the audience, comprised mostly of post-graduate students of international affairs.

The day before, I shyly broached the question of my husband's text, or at least an outline of his text, and my strange new life-mate's response was, "It is almost ready." I spent the whole day in this—my

first witnessing of a public address by my husband— nervously awaiting some “news”. Five minutes before leaving our apartment, he suddenly jotted down a few handwritten notes on a small filing card and told me that that was it.

And so we arrived at the packed audience hall and I took my seat in the front row, not out of self-importance but because my husband insisted that he always liked to have a single face before him to whom he could directly address his words, and mine—as his wife and companion—seemed to him to be the most appropriate one. Dr. Wallace opened the meeting and then turned it over to Muhammad Asad, who forthwith spoke enthusiastically and cogently to his very sophisticated audience, and even forgot to refer to his so-called “notes”. The talk was received with ovation and, even more importantly, followed by a series of very intelligent questions; and many pleasant and stimulating hours passed away.

This is not in itself an important anecdote, but only my explanation of why I personally consider my husband’s total lack of vanity a fault. Naturally, he left no written “script” nor even a tape-recording of this and so many other talks made before live, radio and television audiences. This was the habit of his life.

An almost identical situation occurred in 1959 or 1960, when my husband was invited to address The Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, chaired by Sir Arnold Toynbee, on the principles underlying the idea of an Islamic State. And, unfortunately, this time I was not able to accompany him from Geneva, where we were then living, to London, and so I haven’t a notion of what he said, although I did receive echoes of it from the great Sir Arnold’s, as well as others’, appreciation of it. And so on *ad infinitum*.

Fortunately, I eventually went through some of his old papers and unearthed what I believe to be valuable contributions to Muslim religious and political thought, but the greater part of them had simply been discarded by him. What I have managed to salvage I am presenting herewith, in book form, “for the record”, as a kind of sample of the consistency of this unusual Muslim’s views down the years. And I would request the reader to take note—before and —after reading each of these essays—of the *date* and *year* when they were written or spoken—and then to consider them against the time in which they are now being published. I believe that he and she will be struck, as I have been, not only by the extraordinary timeliness and timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their great consistency. In fact, they

constitute something like a “profile” of the intellectual “face” of Muhammad Asad over more than forty years of his long life. And I would like to share it with my Muslim brethren wherever they may be.

(Foreword to *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* by Muhammad Asad, op. cit., pp. ix-xi.)

لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

For people, who think.

Asad's most favourite part of a Qur'anic verse (13:3)

ISMĀ'IL IBRĀHĪM NAWWĀB

A MATTER OF LOVE: MUHAMMAD ASAD AND ISLAM

*Seest thou not how God strikes the parable of
A good word?—like a good tree, firmly rooted,
With branches reaching into the sky,
It yields its fruit at all times
By the leave of its Sustainer...*

(The Holy Qur'an, *Ibrahim* 14: 24-25).¹

Introduction

Two roads diverged in Berlin in the 1920s: a well-worn one to the west, the other, rarely travelled, to the east. Leopold Weiss, a young gifted Jewish writer, traveller and linguist with a thorough knowledge of the Bible and the Talmud and with deep roots in European culture took the road eastward to Makkah as Muhammad Asad, a name that came to stand high on the roll of twentieth-century English-writing Muslim scholars and thinkers.

The story of how Asad walked out of Berlin and away from the West into the freedom of a new spiritual life is best told in his own words and in a simile cast in the Old Testament:² "After all, it was a matter of love; and love is composed of many things; of our desires and our loneliness, of our high aims and our shortcomings, of our strengths and our weaknesses. So it was in my case. Islam came over to me like a

¹ *The Message of the Qur'an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar Al-Andalus, 1980), 376, modified by the author.

² Being thoroughly versed in the Hebrew Bible, Asad's imagery at times seamlessly draws upon its powerful literary treasures, in this case upon Obadiah 5 (King James Version): "If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night..." A Christian would perhaps have been more familiar with the New Testament's "as a thief in the night..." (2 Peter 3: 10).

robber who enters a house by night; but, unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good".¹

The bare outline of Muhammad Asad's life is no less intriguing than the twists and turns of an Agatha Christie mystery novel. It is an absorbing tale of an inquiring mind who set off on a career in journalism, proceeded to search for truth and ended his voyage of discovery by embracing Islam and interpreting it to its own adherents and to the West.²

Asad's Early Years

Asad was born Leopold Weiss in July 1900 in the city of Lvov (Lemberg), Galicia, now in Poland, and then part of the Austrian Empire. The second of three children, he was the descendant of a long line of rabbis, which was broken only by his father who did not enter the rabbinate but became a barrister. Asad himself received a thorough religious education that would qualify him to keep alive the family's rabbinical tradition. At an early age, he had become proficient in Hebrew and also was familiar with Aramaic. He had studied the Old Testament in the original as well as the text and commentaries of the Talmud: the *Mishna* and *Gemara*. He also had delved in the intricacies of Biblical exegesis: the *Targum*.³

His family moved to Vienna, where fourteen-year-old Asad ran away from school and tried unsuccessfully to join the Austrian army to fight in the First World War; no sooner had he been finally officially drafted, than his juvenile expectations of military glory faded with the collapse of the Austrian Empire.

¹ Asad, "Foreword", (1934), *Islam at the Crossroads*, fourteenth rev. edn. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982), 11. (First published, Delhi and Lahore: Arafat Publications, 1934).

² This is an attempt to encourage an expanded study of Asad's life and thought. Here, an analytical look at Asad and his works is followed by an anthology of extracts compiled and edited from his writings from 1934 to 1987, the better to give the reader the opportunity to listen directly to Asad's unfiltered voice.

³ Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam", *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, September 1981, 59. This is a report of a wide-ranging, candid interview with Asad in a once-lively and bold magazine (1981-1987) that was launched from London by Egyptian-born Saudi writer and publisher Muhammad Salah al-Din and edited by Fathi 'Uthman. In a subsequent issue of the magazine, Asad discussed several "regrettable errors" made in the report and commented on each of them. ("Clarification", October 1981, p. 4).

After the War, he pursued philosophy and the history of art at the University of Vienna, but these studies failed to quench his spiritual thirst and he abandoned them to seek fulfilment elsewhere.¹ Vienna at that time was one of the most intellectually and culturally stimulating European cities. It was the engine of burgeoning and interrelated, new, glittering perspectives on man, language and philosophy. Not just its academic institutions, but even its cafés reverberated with lively debates centered on psychoanalysis, logical positivism, linguistic analysis and semantics. This was the period when the unprecedented views and distinctive voices of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Ludwig Wittgenstein filled the Viennese air, echoing round the world with a profound, momentous effect on many aspects of life and thought. Asad had a ringside seat on these exciting discussions; though he was impressed by the originality of those pioneering spirits, their major conclusions left him unsatisfied.

Asad left Vienna in 1920 and travelled in Central Europe, where he did "all manner of short-lived jobs"² before arriving in Berlin. Here, he ingeniously secured entry in the world of journalism, when his determination led him—a mere telephonist working for a wire service—to a scoop that revealed the presence in Berlin of Maksim Gorky's wife who was on a secret mission to solicit aid from the West for a Brobdingnagian famine ravaging Soviet Russia. At this stage, Asad, like many of his generation, lived in the dark depths of agnosticism, having drifted away from his Jewish moorings despite his rigorous religious studies. He left Europe for the Middle East in 1922, where he came to know and like the Arabs and was struck by how Islam shone on their everyday life with existential meaning, spiritual strength and inner peace. He now became—at the incredibly young age of 22—a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of most prestigious newspapers of Germany and Europe. As a journalist, he travelled extensively, intermingled with the common man, held discussions with the Muslim intelligentsia, and met several regional heads of state, in "the countries between the Libyan Desert and the snow-covered peaks of the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea":³ Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

¹ Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, 4th rev. edn., rept. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993), 58. (First published, London: Max Reinhardt, 1954).

² Ibid., 62.

³ Asad, "Foreword", *Crossroads*, 10-11.

Asad Embraces Islam

During his travels and through his readings, Asad's interest in, and understanding of, Islam, its scripture, history and peoples increased, but, being an agnostic, he could not accept that God spoke to and guided man via revelation. Back in Berlin from the Middle East, and now married, all his doubts were cleared in a spiritual, electrifying epiphany—reminiscent of the experience of some of the earliest Muslims—which he narrated in a striking passage that he wrote some thirty years after this turning-point in his life:

“One day—it was in September 1926—Elsa and I found ourselves travelling in the Berlin subway. It was an upper-class compartment. My eye fell casually on a well-dressed man opposite me, apparently a well-to-do businessman, with a beautiful briefcase on his knees and a large diamond ring on his hand. I thought idly how well the portly figure of this man fitted into the picture of prosperity which one encountered everywhere in Central Europe in those days: a prosperity the more prominent as it had come after years of inflation, when all economic life had been topsy-turvy and shabbiness of appearance the rule. Most of the people were now well dressed and well fed, and the man opposite me was therefore no exception. But when I looked at his face, I did not seem to be looking at a happy face. He appeared to be worried: and not merely worried but acutely unhappy, with eyes staring vacantly ahead and the corners of his mouth drawn in as if in pain—but not in bodily pain. Not wanting to be rude, I turned my eyes away and saw next to him a lady of some elegance. She also had a strangely unhappy expression on her face, as if contemplating or experiencing something that caused her pain; nevertheless, her mouth was fixed in the stiff semblance of a smile which, I was certain, must have been habitual. And then I began to look around at all other faces in the compartment— faces belonging without exception to well-dressed, well-fed people: and in almost every one of them I could discern an expression of hidden suffering, so hidden that the owner of the face seemed to be quite unaware of it.

This was indeed strange. I had never before seen so many

unhappy faces around me: or was it perhaps that I had never before looked for what was now so loudly speaking in them? The impression was so strong that I mentioned it to Elsa, and she too began to look around with the careful eyes of a painter accustomed to study human features. Then she turned to me, astonished, and said: 'You are right. They all look as though they were suffering torments of hell. ..I wonder, do they know themselves what is going on in them!'

I knew that they did not— for otherwise they could not go on wasting their lives as they did, without any faith in binding truths, without any goal beyond the desire to raise their own 'standard of living', without any hopes other than having more material amenities, more gadgets, and perhaps more power...

When we returned home, I happened to glance at my desk on which lay open a copy of the Koran I had been reading earlier. Mechanically, I picked the book up to put it away, but just as I was about to close it, my eyes fell on the open page before me, and I read:

*"You are obsessed by greed for more and more
Until you go down to your graves.
Nay, but you will come to know!
And once again: Nay, but you will come to know!
Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty,
You would indeed see the hell you are in.
In time, indeed, you shall see it with the eye of certainty:
And on that Day you will be asked what you have done with the
boon of life'.¹*

For a moment I was speechless. I think that the book shook in my hands. Then I handed it to Elsa. 'Read this. Is it not an answer to what we saw in the subway?'

It was an answer so decisive that all doubt was suddenly at an end. I knew now, beyond any doubt, that it was a God-inspired book I was holding in my hand: for although it had been placed before man over thirteen centuries ago, it clearly anticipated

¹ The Qur'an, 102: 1-8. The translation of this short *surah* that appeared originally in *The Road to Mecca* in 1954 was later improved by Asad in his *The Message of the Qur'an*. The present version is a synthesis of the best of both renderings. (IIN's note)

something that could have become true only in this complicated, mechanized, phantom-ridden age of ours.

At all times people had known greed: but at no time before greed had outgrown a mere eagerness to acquire things and become an obsession that blurred the sight of everything else: an irresistible craving to get, to do, to contrive more and more—more today than yesterday, and more tomorrow than today: a demon riding on the necks of men and whipping their hearts forward toward goals that tauntingly glitter in the distance but dissolve into contemptible nothingness as soon as they are reached, always holding out the promise of new goals ahead—goals still more brilliant, more tempting as long as they lie on the horizon, and bound to wither into further nothingness as soon as they come within grasp: and that hunger, that insatiable hunger for ever new goals gnawing at man's soul: *Nay, if you but knew it you would see the hell you are in...*

This, I saw, was not the mere human wisdom of a man of a distant past in distant Arabia. However wise he may have been, such a man could not by himself have foreseen the torment so peculiar to this twentieth century. Out of the Koran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad..."¹

Asad migrates to the Muslim World

Thus it was that Asad became a Muslim in 1926 and migrated to the Muslim world but the psychological and emotional dimensions of Asad's migration were even more important than the physical ones. Asad regarded Islam not as a religion in the conventional, or Western, sense but as a way of life for all times. In Islam he found a religious system and a practical ideology for everyday living that were harmoniously balanced. "Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking; and the result is a structure of absolute balance and solid composure".²

The range of his interest in the Muslim world was as varied as the reach of his travels in the lands of Islam and he found a way of infusing a visionary's magnificence into writings that looked at and

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 308-310.

² Asad, "Foreword", *Crossroads*, 11.

beyond contemporary Islam. His interest in Islam and its followers persisted throughout his life and deeply coloured his treatment of all issues touching the Muslims—religious, juristic and political—and he had highly persuasive arguments for his views. Though he was always ideologically and emotionally committed to the Muslims, his attitude towards them remained sympathetic without being sycophantic, intelligently critical but never condescending. Above all, Asad was deeply dedicated to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet, tenaciously independent in his thinking, fiercely anti-secular in his orientation, rigorously consistent in his logic and always impatient with extremist thought or behaviour. When he returned to the Middle East following his conversion, Asad spent almost six years in Arabia, where he was received warmly, almost daily, by the legendary King 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ūd (d. 1373/1953), the founder of modern Saudi Arabia.¹ He spent considerable time in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, where he studied Arabic, the Qur'an, the *Hadith*, or the traditions of the Prophet and Islamic history. Those studies led him to "the firm conviction that Islam, as a spiritual and social phenomenon, is still, in spite of all the drawbacks caused by the deficiencies of the Muslims, by far the greatest driving force mankind has ever experienced"² and from that time, his interest "centred around the problem of its regeneration".³ His academic knowledge of classical Arabic—made easier by familiarity with Hebrew and Aramaic, sister Semitic languages—was further enhanced by his wide travels and contacts in Arabia with Bedouins.

Iqbal invites Asad to stay in India

To study Muslim communities and cultures further east, such as those of India, Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia, Asad departed Arabia for India in 1932. There he met the celebrated poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1357/1938), the towering Muslim thinker of the modern era and the spiritual progenitor of Pakistan. Iqbal persuaded Asad to change his plans and stay on in India "to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state which was then hardly more than a dream in Iqbal's visionary mind".⁴ Asad soon won Iqbal's admiration and wide public acclaim among educated circles with the

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 1.

² Asad, "Foreword", *Crossroads*, 12.

³ Loc. cit.

⁴ Asad, *Mecca*, 2.

publication of a perceptive monograph on the challenges facing modern Muslims. But Asad's freedom was curtailed when the Second World War broke out in 1939. Ironically, though he had refused, to accept a passport from Nazi Germany after it had annexed Austria in 1938 and insisted on retaining his Austrian citizenship, the British Raj imprisoned him on the second day of the War as an "enemy alien" and did not release him till its end in 1945.¹ He was the only Western Muslim among the three-thousand-odd Europeans rounded up for internment in India, the large majority of whom were sympathizers of Nazism or Fascism; some have thought that the British authorities' harsh behaviour to Asad was due to their irritation with a European who always sided with the Indian Muslim community.

Asad in the Service of the emerging Muslim State of Pakistan

He moved to Pakistan after its creation in 1947, and was charged by its Government with setting up a Department of Islamic Reconstruction whose task was to formulate the ideological foundations for the new state. Later he was transferred to the Pakistan Foreign Ministry to head its Middle East Division, where he endeavoured to strengthen Pakistan's ties to other Muslim countries. He capped his diplomatic career by serving as Pakistan's Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations.² He resigned this position in 1952 to write his autobiography, a work of stunning ingenuity and unrivalled literary effect.

Asad Passes Away

After writing this book, he left New York in 1955 for other places and finally settled in Spain. He did not cease to write. At eighty, after an endeavour which lasted seventeen years, he realized his life's dream, for which he felt all his life till then was an apprenticeship: a translation and exegesis, or *tafsir*, of the Qur'an in English. He continued to serve Islam till his death in Spain in February 1992.

[To the righteous God will say:]
 "O soul at peace! Return to thy Sustainer,

¹ Asad, "Author's Note", *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993), 1. (First published 1987).

² Asad, *Mecca*, 2.

*Well-pleased, well-pleasing!
Enter thou, then, among My servants!
Yea, enter thou My paradise"¹*

With his death passed a journalist, traveller, social critic, linguist, thinker, reformer, diplomat, political theorist, translator and scholar dedicated to the service of God and humankind and to leading the good life.

But death will not be the final chapter in Asad's close relationship with the Muslims: his luminous works remain a living testimony to his great, enduring love affair with Islam.

Asad represents a New Phenomenon

Asad, in fact, represents an outstanding example of a new phenomenon of modern times: the conversion, on both sides of the Atlantic, of several Western writers and intellectuals to Islam and their passionate commitment to its vision and way of life. The circumstances and particulars of their entering the fold of Islam may vary, but there are usually three overarching reasons common to them: a belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an and in the prophethood of Muhammad and in Islam's message to lead the good life. Their act of faith has shown to a wider Western public that, contrary to the misperception that it is a quaint, fanatical religion followed by wild natives in remote regions, Islam's message and teachings are relevant to, and appropriate for, reasonable and thoughtful people in the most advanced areas of the world. Equally significant, it has also demonstrated that, at least among some fair-minded Westerners, the centuries-old barriers of false images of Islam which went up with the Crusades are falling down. This phenomenon is all the more remarkable in that often these converts find their way to the Muslim faith via a very unlikely path; literature on Islam and the Muslims produced in European languages mostly by orientalists the majority of whom cannot be accused of being friendly to Islam; actually, some are orientalists themselves. Also, most of these conversions have taken place while Western powers were exercising their full political and military might in Muslim lands. The appeal of Islam to Western élites has not been confined to any one country. To

¹ The Qur'an, 89: 27-30, as rendered by Asad in *The Message of the Qur'an* and revised by the author.

mention just a few names: from Great Britain have come, among others, Lord Stanley of Alderley, an uncle of Bertrand Russell, the eleventh Baron Headley (Umar al-Farooq), a member of the House of Lords and an activist believer, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a superb novelist and, later, a translator of the Qur'an, Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din), a perceptive scholar of mysticism, and Charles Le Gai Eaton, a talented expositor of Islam; from France: René Guénon ('Abd al-Wāhid Yahya), an expert in metaphysics, comparative religion and esotericism; Vincent Mansour Monteil, an orientalist, and Maurice Bucaille, an author; from Germany: Murad Wilfried Hofmann, a diplomat and writer; from Austria: Baron Umar von Ehrenfels, an anthropologist; from Hungary: Abdul Kariin Germanus, an orientalist; from Switzerland: Frithjof Schuon, described by T. S. Eliot as the most impressive writer in the field of comparative religion he had ever encountered, and patrician German Swiss Titus (Ibrahim) Burckhardt, a scholar of mysticism and the son of sculptor Carl Burckhardt; from North America: Thomas Irving (al-Hajj Ta'lim 'Ali), an Islamic scholar and translator of the Qur'an, Hamid Algar, British-born distinguished academic with special interest in Iran, Margaret Marcus (Maryam Jameelah), a writer, Cyril Glasse, author of Islamic works, Jeffrey Lang, a mathematician and writer on Islam, and Michael Wolfe, a poet, novelist, and writer of travel books.

Asad's Special Place

It would seem that these Western Muslims have been just as earnest in their devotion to Islam as Muhammad Asad. So, why does Asad stand head and shoulders above all other Western English-writing converts? What is his secret?

He rose to unparalleled eminence among Western Muslims because none has contributed more than Asad to elucidating Islam as an ideology and conveying its quintessential spirit in contemporary terms to Muslims and non-Muslims alike—not even Pickthall (d. 1355/1936), "an Englishman of the English",¹ who can easily be credited with the most widely read translation of the Qur'an undertaken by any English-writing convert,² with brilliant writings on Islam and with wide-ranging

¹ Quoted from Pickthall's Suffolk novel *Larkmeadow* (1912) in Peter Clark's well-researched biography, *Marmaduke Pickthall: British Muslim* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 7.

² His rendering of the Qur'an entitled *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* first

services to the Muslims, sometimes rendered at great personal sacrifice.

Asad's contributions resist easy summary, but we can cast a glance at his writings and thought to pick out the features on the landscape rather than describe the scene in detail. For an appreciation of his work, however, we have to see it against the backdrop of his first encounter with the Muslim world.

Decline of the Muslims in Recent Times

Asad's introduction to the Muslim world took place when he visited a turbulent, fearful Middle East in the wake of the First World War. The threat that many Muslims perceived coming from the West at that time can today hardly be remembered or conceived of and is difficult to encapsulate in a few sentences. From the Muslims' perspective of the colonial West,

*Black it stood as night,
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
And shook a dreadful dart.¹*

at Islam itself.

For the previous two centuries, an ascendant Europe had remade the map of the Muslim world from the shores of Morocco on the Atlantic in the west to the fertile countryside of Mindanao in the Pacific in the east, and from the mountains of Daghestan in the north to the coconut-palm-fringed beaches of the Maldivé Islands in the Indian Ocean in the south. Its military, political, cultural and economic onslaught on the area had blown up like a hurricane. The glory of the Mughals of India and Safavids of Persia had passed away; the back of the once-formidable Ottoman state had been broken; the Caliphate—an institution which, though reduced in status, still enjoyed popular support—had been abolished. The Muslims lagged far behind the West in the educational, industrial and technological and scientific fields. As the first decades of the twentieth century wore on, they felt at bay. They were deeply divided, disheartened and humiliated. They had been so weakened that some quarters even harbored designs to ring down the last curtain on Islam as a religion and civilization.

appeared in 1930 and has been reprinted numerous times.

¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. II, lines 670-672.

Cross-Currents in a tempestuous Muslim World

By the time Asad came to the Middle East in 1922, these momentous changes had loosened a storm of new values, concepts and social stresses on the Muslim world; of unprecedented violence and scope, it threatened to sweep away the very foundations of Muslim society. Many Muslims still cherished traditional Islamic values. Yet, a broad spectrum of competing, confusing trends appeared in the Islamic world as the influence of the West had left few Muslim countries untouched. There were movements in support of religious reform which had their roots in Muslim tradition. Muhammad 'Abduh of Egypt (d. 1323/1905) and Iqbal represented this trend in the early twentieth century and their influence remains strong and alive. But there were also advocates of the newly imported ideas of westernization, nationalism, and secularism who looked to the West for inspiration. The spearheads of these ideologies were Kemal Atatürk (d. 1357/1938) of Turkey and Reza Shah of Iran (d. 1365/1944). As it was not possible to square the antipodal ideas of the traditional Islamic reformers with those of the advocates of westernization and secularism, a complete rupture between them was soon fairly fully established.

Asad's Vision of his Primary Goals

Asad saw it as his destiny and duty to critically examine the causes of the decline of the Muslims as well as the forces and the problems pressing them and to wake them from their slumber. Driven by the zeal of a reformer, Asad tried to bridge the gap between the traditional and modern worlds. He was repelled by what he saw as the religiously and socially disruptive new fangled ideas spreading in the Islamic world: westernization, secularism, nationalism and materialism. Like other writers and thinkers who had in them "a spark of the flame which burned in the hearts of the Companions of the Prophet",¹ he responded to the challenge to reconcile religion and modernization and to produce a wide-ranging synthesis of Islam, modernity, and the needs of the society of the day.

Asad lived in an era of immense social, intellectual and political

¹ Asad, "Foreword", *Crossroads*, 12.

creativity. While most other reformers shook the Muslim world with the thunder of their spirit, power of their charisma and strength of their popular support, he was an intellectual who did not belong to any organization. Asad's obvious virtues, those which no reader can fail to see immediately, are depth of knowledge, clarity of reasoning and the meticulous exposition and dissection of arguments, even when he accepts their conclusions. It is his peculiar achievement that, with high virtuosity and great passion, he contrived to make a coherent whole of his diverse concerns.

Asad's Intellectual Vigour and Reach

The primary sources of Asad's inspiration were the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet. But he could not fail to be impressed by 'Abduh and Iqbal and other thinkers who had earlier diagnosed the ills of Muslim society and prescribed a similar remedy for it. A vigorous promoter of Muslim ideology and values and a precursor of those Muslims who were proud of their identity and wanted to preserve it in a changing, tumultuous world, Asad instilled in his public new confidence in the power and future of Islam. To do all this, he used a powerful tool: his pen.

The reach, range, depth and relevance of what he penned were immense. Asad's writings on Islam and the Muslims extend over half a century, from the 1920s to the 1980s. His writings include: *Unromantisches Morgenland* (1924); *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934); *Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam* (1935-1938), an annotated translation; *The Road to Mecca* (1954); *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (1961); *The Message of the Qur'an* (1964-1980), an interpretation of, and a commentary on, the Muslim Holy Book; and *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (1987). Between 1946 and 1947 he also brought out a journal, *'Arafat: A Monthly Critique of Muslim Thought*.

Asad's first book, *Unromantisches Morgenland* [*The Unromantic East*], based on his travels and observations as a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was published in the mid-1920s. It showed an unusual insight into the Middle East. Its title "was meant to convey that it was not a book about the romantic, exotic outward picture of the Muslim East but rather an endeavour to penetrate to its day-by-day realities".

After he accepted Islam, Asad might have had as his motto the heading under which George Orwell used to contribute his weekly essay to *Tribune*—"I Write as I Please". But, despite the freedom he enjoyed

because of his independent status, he kept his focus on subjects essential to the spiritual survival and well-being of the Muslim community.

Islam at the Crossroads

Asad's first publication as a committed Muslim was *Islam at the Crossroads*, published in 1934. It heralded the arrival of a brilliant English-writing convert with a bold, dynamic vision. A man unafraid of controversy, he had one single, enduring, driving goal: to help bring back the Muslims to the two original sources which were the foundation of their spiritual and temporal greatness, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the practice of the Prophet—"the only binding explanation of the Qur'anic teachings".¹

The book did not claim to give a comprehensive answer to the many ailments that had weakened and destabilized the Muslim world. Raising the banner of revolt against the intellectual, social and political challenge posed by an ever-expanding Western *Weltanschauung*, the primary aim of *Islam at the Crossroads* was to warn the Muslims against blindly imitating Western values and mores, which Asad thought posed a mortal danger to Islam. It had an authentic Iqbalian spirit, and was an incisive, sweeping—and, often, a startling but refreshing—response to a tide which had long flowed in favour of Western cultural and political hegemony. Moreover, it vivified a debate in progress on two of the fundamental concerns which exercised Muslim reformers: the perplexing problems of westernization and Muslim revival and the extent to which it was necessary for Muslims to follow the West's ways in order to achieve progress.

Asad was mortified at the ineffable distance in ideals, goals and outlook between Islam and the concept of westernization. Consequently, his *Islam at the Crossroads* crystallized an uncompromising defence of Islam's traditions and values against the incursions of the westernizers; it also was a polemical and impassioned attack against imitators of the West and detractors of traditional Islam.

Asad's Emphasis on the Qur'an and Sunnah

He espoused adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, without which he thought Islam and Muslim civilization could

¹ Asad, *Crossroads*, 85.

not survive. He says in *Islam at the Crossroads*: "Many reform proposals have been advanced during the last decades, and many spiritual doctors have tried to devise a patent medicine for the sick body of Islam. But, until now, all has been in vain, because all those clever doctors—at least those who get a hearing today—have invariably forgotten to prescribe, along with their medicines, tonics, and elixirs, the natural *diet* on which the early development of the patient had been based. This diet, the one which the body of Islam, sound or sick, can positively accept and assimilate, is the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad".¹ "The Sunnah", he emphasizes "is the key to the understanding of the Islamic rise more than thirteen centuries ago; and why should it not be a key to the understanding of our present degeneration? Observance of the Sunnah is synonymous with Islamic existence and progress. Neglect of the Sunnah is synonymous with a decomposition of and decay of Islam. The Sunnah is the iron framework of a building; and if you remove the framework can you be surprised if it breaks down like a house of cards"?²

The salience of the *Sunnah* for Muslims is stressed in many places in *Islam at the Crossroads*. One such example is: "The term *Sunnah* is used in its widest meaning, namely, the example the Prophet has set before us in his attitudes, actions and sayings. His wonderful life was a living illustration and explanation of the Qur'an, and we can do no greater justice to the Holy Book than by following him who was the means of revelation".³

He was receptive to the Muslims being open to the world, but insisted on their maintaining their spiritual and cultural identity. "A Muslim must live with his head held high", he writes in this book. "This does not mean that Muslims should seclude themselves from the voices coming from without. One may at all times receive new, positive influences from a foreign civilization without necessarily abandoning his own. An example of this kind was the European Renaissance. There we have seen how readily Europe accepted Arab influences in the matter and method of learning. But it never imitated the outward appearance and the spirit of Arabian culture, and never sacrificed its own intellectual and aesthetic independence. It used Arab influences only as a fertilizer upon its own soil, just as the Arabs had used Hellenistic influences in their time. In both cases, the result was a spiritual enrichment, a strong,

¹ Ibid., 82.

² Loc. cit.

³ Asad, *Crossroads*, 83.

new growth of an indigenous civilization, full of self-confidence and pride in itself. No civilization can prosper, or even exist, after having lost this pride and the connection with its own past".¹

Asad was always steadfast in his beliefs. But in fairness to him, it should be mentioned that, while he held steadfastly to his beliefs, his views mellowed with time. In a later edition of *Islam at the Crossroads*, he softened his occasional astringent stance on several issues he had raised some four decades earlier.

Widespread Impact of *Islam at the Crossroads*

Islam at the Crossroads contributed to the breaking up of the ice of *anomie* and malaise prevalent in the Muslim world at the time. It received great critical acclaim and was a commercial success, which cannot be said of all of Asad's books. But it can safely be said that it is one of Asad's works on which his fame will rest. Iqbal—who outshone all other Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century—called it an eye-opener. It is perhaps Asad's most widely read and translated book. Its immaculate Arabic version done by 'Umar Farrukh (d. 1408/1987), a prominent Lebanese scholar, and introduced by the eminent Mustafa al-Khālidi, had a wider readership than the original, which itself has been reprinted fourteen times.² Interestingly, like *Citizen Kane*, which was a young Orson Welles' seminal screen masterpiece, *Islam at the Crossroads* catapulted Asad to great fame at the start of his productive career; and like the classic film, the brilliant critique of the westernization movement, was an act that was hard for its author to follow. But other writing themes and achievements beckoned the young Asad.

Sahih al-Bukhāri

After *Islam at the Crossroads*, Asad focused his attention on one of the earlier and most enduring of his concerns as a reformer: "to make real the voice of the Prophet of Islam—real, as if he were speaking directly to us and for us; and it is in the *hadith* that his voice can be most clearly heard".³ Like other Islamic reformers, he thought that knowledge of the traditions of the Prophet—which complement and amplify the

¹ Ibid., 79-80.

² *Al-Islam 'ala Muftaraq al-Turuq* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li'l-Malayin, 1946).

³ Asad, "Preface to the First Edition", *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. v. (First published 1938).

Qur'an—was necessary for “a new understanding and a *direct* appreciation of the true teachings of Islam”.¹

In fact, he had been preoccupied with the Prophet's *Sunnah*, or way of life, from his Madinah days. Toward this end, and with the encouragement of Iqbal he attempted a task that till then had never been undertaken in English. This was the translation of, and commentary on, the Prophet's authentic traditions as carefully and critically compiled in the ninth century—over a period of sixteen years—by the greatest traditionist al-Bukhāri (d. 256/870). Between 1935 and 1938, Asad published the first five of forty projected installments of al-Bukhāri's celebrated work under the title, *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*. But due to his internment during the Second World War, the destruction of the manuscripts of his annotated rendering in the chaos that followed the partition of India and the press of other intellectual activities after the creation of Pakistan, he was unable to complete the publication of this work,² esteemed by many Muslims to be second only to the Qur'an in importance. Years later, he described the sad scene of the end of his loving effort to make the Prophet's voice heard and understood in English: “With my own eyes I saw a few scattered leaves of those manuscripts floating down the river Ravi in the midst of torn Arabic books—the remnants of my library—and all manner of debris; and with those poor, floating pieces of paper vanished beyond recall more than ten years of intensive labour”.³ But the years spent on this undertaking were not spent in vain; on the contrary, they were, as Asad himself recognized, a preparation for a greater task that was awaiting him. But of this later.

The Road to Mecca: Asad's Story of his Spiritual Journey

To the delight and benefit of his readers, his next book, *The Road to Mecca*, revealed the gems of literary talent in the secret casket of Asad's genius.

In *The Road to Mecca*, published in 1954, Asad offers us nearly 380 enthralling pages which revolve around the only love that captivated him for life: Islam. His story is “simply”, he says, “the story of a European's discovery of Islam and of his integration within the Muslim

¹ Loc. cit.

² Asad, “Preface to the Second Edition”, *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. ix.

³ Loc. cit.

community".¹ He wrote it in response to those of his Western colleagues in New York who had been baffled by his conversion and identification with the Muslims. "Serving as Pakistan's Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations, I was naturally in the public eye and encountered a great deal of curiosity among my European and American friends and acquaintances. At first they assumed that mine was the case of a European 'expert' employed by an Eastern government for a specific purpose, and that I had conveniently adapted myself to the ways of the nation which I was serving; but when my activities at the United Nations made it obvious that I identified myself not merely 'functionally' but also emotionally and intellectually with the political and cultural aims of the Muslim world in general, they became somewhat perplexed".²

But what a rich story and how marvelously told! It covers Asad's life from his beginnings in Lvov in 1900 to his last desert journey in Arabia in 1932. It treats of vast themes: a journey in space and in spirit, an exploration of vast geographical distances and of the deep interior recesses of a man's psyche. *The Road to Mecca* gives us a rounded portrait of a restless man in search of adventure and truth. It is part spiritual autobiography, part summary of the author's intuitive insights into Islam and the Arabs, part an impressive travelogue. Spiced with a virtuosity of literary technique, a perfect prose style fashioned for the purpose, and a European storyteller's urbane sensibility and infused with a genuine sympathy for the world it describes, *The Road to Mecca* often eclipses the classic travel books on Arabia: those of Charles Doughty, Richard Burton, T. E. Lawrence, Freya Stark and Wilfrid Thesiger.

Punctuated with abundant adventure, moments of contemplation, colourful narrative, brilliant description and lively anecdote, *The Road to Mecca* tells a story that on all counts is gripping but which necessarily suffers in a skeletal condensing. It tells of the upbringing of Muhammad Asad in his homeland as Leopold Weiss, an Austrian Jew who was descended of orthodox rabbis; of his university days in Vienna; of musings on the human condition in the West; of wanderings across Central Europe in search of a fulfilling life; of gate-crashing into the world of journalism in Berlin; of his extensive travels all over the Middle East; of soul-stirring visits to Jerusalem and Cairo; of working as a correspondent for one of the most prestigious German

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 1.

² Loc. cit.

newspapers; of falling in love with Islam and the Arabs; of a momentous conversion to the Muslim faith and becoming Muhammad Asad; of sojourning in Arabia for six years and being the guest of King 'Abd al-'Aziz, the monarch who coalesced once-warring tribes into a unified, peaceful kingdom; of living like an Arab, wearing only Arab dress, speaking only Arabic, dreaming dreams in Arabic; of travelling with the Bedouin; of studying Islam's scripture and history in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah; of going on pilgrimage; of encounters with people belonging to every stratum of society—the simple man in the street, the sophisticated intellectual, the shrewd merchant and the powerful head of state; of going on a hazardous secret mission to Italian-occupied Cyrenaica to contact and assist 'Umar al-Mukhtār (hanged by the Italians in 1350/1931), the warrior-hero of the country's freedom movement. And, throughout, there are two motifs which are embroidered on every panel of this wonderfully crafted tapestry: a deep faith in God and an overwhelming love for the Arabian Prophet.

Above all, *The Road to Mecca* tells a human story, a story of a modern man's restlessness and loneliness, passions and ambitions, joys and sorrows, anxiety and commitment, vision and humaneness. Its author comes out as brilliant, exciting, lively, full of penetrating observation, immense charm, tremendous zest for life and deeply held religious beliefs. Significantly, he triumphantly achieves his purpose in writing *The Road to Mecca*: none can read it without getting a better appreciation of Islam. Resigning as Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations in order to devote himself to writing this book, he became an ambassador of Islam to the West—and to many alienated intellectuals and youths in Muslim lands.

This book is interesting at any point of entry. Like any classic, *The Road to Mecca* has passages which never lose their flavour, despite repeated reading. Here is a breathtaking display of Asad's religious feeling and narrative skill. It is also an unsurpassed nostalgic description of the pilgrimage of a bygone era:

On the Hajj

“Not far from here, hidden from my eyes in the midst of this lifeless wilderness of valleys and hills, lies the plain of Arafat, on which all pilgrims who come to Mecca assemble on one day of the year as a reminder of that Last Assembly, when man will have to answer to his Creator for all he has done in life. How

often have I stood there myself, bareheaded, in the white pilgrim garb, among a multitude of white-garbed, bareheaded pilgrims from three continents, our faces turned toward the Jabal ar-Rahma—the 'Mount of Mercy'—which arises out of the vast plain: standing and waiting through the noon, through the afternoon, reflecting upon that inescapable Day, 'when you will be exposed to view, not one secret of yours will remain concealed'...¹

And as I stand on the hillcrest and gaze down toward the invisible Plain of Arafat, the moonlit blueness of the landscape before me, so dead a moment ago, suddenly comes to life with the currents of all the human lives that have passed through it and is filled with the eerie voices of the millions of men and women who have walked or ridden between Mecca and Arafat in over thirteen hundred pilgrimages for over thirteen hundred years. Their voices and their steps and the voices and the steps of their animals reawaken and resound anew; I see them walking and riding and assembling—all those myriads of white-garbed pilgrims of thirteen hundred years; I hear the sounds of their passed-away days; the wings of the faith which has drawn them together to this land of rocks and sand and seeming deadness beat again with the warmth of life over the arc of centuries, and the mighty wingbeat draws me into its orbit and draws my own passed-away days into the present, and once again I am riding over the plain—

—riding in a thundering gallop over the plain, amidst thousands and thousands of *ihram-clad* bedouins, returning from Arafat to Mecca—a tiny particle of that roaring, earth-shaking, irresistible wave of countless galloping dromedaries and men, with the tribal banners on their high poles beating like drums in the wind and their tribal war cries tearing through the air: 'Ya Rawga, ya Rawga!' by which the Atayba tribesmen evoke their ancestors name, answered by the 'Ya Awf, ya Awf!' of the Harb and echoed by the almost defiant, 'Shammar, ya Shammar!' from the farthest right wing of the column.

We ride on, rushing, flying over the plain, and to me it seems that we are flying with the wind, abandoned to a happiness that knows neither end nor limit...and the wind shouts a wild paean

¹ Cf. The Qur'an, 69: 18 (IIN's note).

of joy into my ears: 'Never again, never again, never again will you be a stranger'!

My brethren on the right and my brethren on the left, all of them unknown to me but none a stranger: in the tumultuous joy of our chase, we are one body in pursuit of one goal. Wide is the world before us, and in our hearts glimmers a spark of the flame that burned in the hearts of the Prophet's Companions. They know, my brethren on the right and my brethren on the left, that they have fallen short of what was expected of them, and that in the flight of centuries their hearts have grown small: and yet, the promise of fulfilment has not been taken from them...from us...

Someone in the surging host abandons his tribal cry for a cry of faith: 'We are the brethren of him who gives himself up to God'!—and another joins in: '*Allahu Akbar*'!—'God is the Greatest!—God alone is Great'!

And all the tribal detachments take up this one cry. They are no longer Najdi beduins revelling in their tribal pride: they are men who know that the secrets of God are but waiting for them...for us...Amidst the din of thousands of rushing camels' feet and the flapping of a hundred banners, their cry grows into a roar of triumph: '*Allahu Akbar*'!

It flows in mighty waves over the heads of the thousands of galloping men, over the wide plain, to all the ends of the earth: '*Allahu Akbar*'! These men have grown beyond their own little lives, and now their faith sweeps them forward, in oneness, toward some uncharted horizon... Longing need no longer remain small and hidden; it has found its awakening, a blinding sunrise of fulfillment. In this fulfillment, man strides along in all his God and his knowledge is freedom, and his world a sphere without bounds...

The smell of the dromedaries' bodies, their panting and snorting, the thundering of their innumerable feet; the shouting of the men, the clanking of the rifles slung on saddle-pegs, the dust and the sweat and the wildly excited faces around me; and a sudden, glad stillness within me.

I turn around in my saddle and see behind me the waving, weaving mass of thousands of white-clad riders and, beyond them, the bridge over which I have come: its end is just behind

me while its beginning is already lost in the mists of distance".¹

After perusing this and other stirring spiritual experiences in Asad, it would seem that, with few exceptions, reading other Muslims' accounts of their encounter with Islam is like reading doggerel verse after Milton. In another arresting passage, Asad's intense devotion to the Prophet and the ambiance of his "wondrous spiritual presence permeating Madinah is portrayed:

On Madinah

"I enter the city and cross the huge, open square of Al-Manakha to the inner city wall; beneath the heavy arch of the Egyptian Gate, under which the money-changers sit clinking their gold and silver coins, I step into the main bazaar—a street hardly twelve feet across, tightly packed with shops around which a small but eager life pulsates.

The vendors praise their goods with cheerful songs. Gay headcloths, silken shawls and robes of figured Kashmir wool attract the eye of the passerby. Silversmiths, crouch behind small glass cases containing bedouin jewellery—arm-rings and ankle-rings, necklaces and earrings. Perfume vendors display basins filled with henna, little red bags with antimony for colouring the eyelashes, multicoloured bottles of oils and essences, and heaps of spices. Traders from Najd are selling beduin garments and camel-saddles and long-tasselled red and blue saddlebags from eastern Arabia. An auctioneer runs through the street, shouting at the top of his voice, with a Persian carpet and a camel-hair *abaya* over his shoulder and a brass samovar under his arm. Floods of people in both directions, people from Medina and the rest of Arabia and—as the time of the pilgrimage has ended only a short while ago—from all the countries between the East Indies and the Atlantic Ocean, between Astrakhan and Zanzibar: but in spite of the multitude of people and narrowness of the street, there is no hurried frenzy here, no pushing and jostling: for in Medina time does not ride on the wings of pursuit.

But what might appear even more strange is that despite the

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 373-375.

great variety of human types and costumes that fills them, there is nothing of an 'exotic' medley in the streets of Medina: the variety of appearances reveals itself only to the eye that is determined to analyze. It seems to me that all the people who live in this city, or even sojourn in it temporarily, very soon fall into one might call a community of mood and thus also of behaviour, and, almost, even of facial expression: for all of them have fallen under the spell of the Prophet, whose city it once was and whose guests they now are...

Even after thirteen centuries his spiritual presence is almost as alive here as it was then. It was only because of him that the scattered group of villages once called Yathrib became a city and has been loved by all Muslims down to this day as no city anywhere else in the world has ever been loved. It has not even a name of its own: for more than thirteen hundred years it has been called *Madinat an-Nabi*, 'the City of the Prophet'. For more than thirteen hundred years, so much love has converged here that all shapes and movements have acquired a kind of family resemblance, and all differences of appearance find a tonal transition into a common-harmony.

This is the happiness one always feels here—this unifying harmony. Although life in Medina today has only a formal, distant relationship with what the Prophet aimed at; although the spiritual awareness of Islam has been cheapened here, as in many other parts of the Muslim world: an indescribable emotional link with its great spiritual past has remained alive. Never has any city been so loved for the sake of one single personality; never has any man, dead for over thirteen hundred years, been loved so personally, and by so many, as he who lies buried beneath the great green dome....

It was precisely because he was only human, because he lived like other men, enjoying the pleasures and suffering the ills of human existence, that those around him could so encompass him with their love.

This love has outlasted his death and lives on in the hearts of his followers like the *leitmotif* of a melody built up of many tones. It lives on in Medina. It speaks to you out of every stone of the ancient city. You can almost touch it with your hands: but you

cannot capture it in words..."¹

And there is this inimitable jewel:

On the Desert

"And now in this late summer of 1932, we ride together, as so often in the past, winding our lonesome way between dunes, stopping at one or another of the widely spaced wells and resting at night under the stars; the eternal *swish-swish* of the animals' feet over the hot sand; sometimes, during the march, Zayd's² husky voice chanting in rhythm with the camels' tread; night camps, cooking coffee and rice and occasional wild game; the cool sweep over our bodies as we lie at night on the sand; sunrise over sand dunes, red and violently bursting like fireworks; and sometimes, like today, the miracle of life awaking in a plant that has been watered by chance.

We had stopped for our noon prayer. As I washed my hands, face and feet from a waterskin, a few drops spilled over a dried-up tuft of grass at my feet, a miserable little plant, yellow and withered and lifeless under the harsh rays of the sun. But as the water trickled over it, a shiver went through the shrivelled blades, and I saw how they slowly, tremblingly, unfolded. A few more drops, and the little blades moved and curled and then straightened themselves slowly, hesitatingly, trembling...I held my breath as I poured more water over the grass tuft. It moved more quickly, more violently, as if some hidden force were pushing it out of its dream of death. Its blades—what a delight to behold!—contracted and expanded like the arms of a starfish, seemingly overwhelmed by a shy but irrepressible delirium, a real little orgy of sensual joy: and thus life re-entered victoriously what a moment ago had been as dead, entered it visibly, passionately, overpowering and beyond in its majesty.³

Life in its majesty...you always feel it in the desert. Because it is so difficult to keep and so hard, it is always like a gift, a treasure,

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 250-252.

² Zayd ibn Ghanim, Asad's traveling companion.

³ This age-old miracle of re-birth is cited in sublime imagery and sonorous words in the Qur'an (22: 5-7) as one of the many eloquent signs of God's power to resurrect the dead. (IIN's note).

and a surprise. For the desert is always surprising, even though you may have known it for years. Sometimes, when you think you can see it in all its rigidity and emptiness, it awakens from its dream, sends forth its breath—and tender, pale green grass stands suddenly where only yesterday there was nothing but sand and splintery pebbles. It sends forth its breath again—and a flock of small birds flutters through the air—from where?—where to?—slim-bodied, long-winged, emerald-green; or a swarm of locusts rises up above the earth with a rush and a zoom, grey and grim and endless like a horde of hungry warriors...

Life in its majesty: majesty of sparseness, always surprising: herein lies the whole nameless scent of Arabia, of sand deserts like this one, and of the many other changing landscapes.

Sometimes, it is lava ground, black and jagged; sometimes dunes without end; sometimes a *wadi* between rocky hills, covered with thornbushes out of which a startled hare jumps across your way; sometimes loose sand with tracks of gazelles and a few fire-blackened stones over which long-forgotten wayfarers cooked their food in long-forgotten days; sometimes a village beneath palm trees and the wooden wheels over the wells make music and sing to you without stopping; sometimes a well in the midst of a desert valley, with beduin herdsmen bustling around it to water their thirsty sheep and camels—they chant in chorus while the water is drawn up in large leather buckets and poured with a rush into leather troughs to the delight of the excited animals. Then again, there is loneliness in steppes overcome by a sun without mercy; patches of hard, yellow grass and leafy bushes that crawl over the ground with snaky branches offer welcome pasture to your dromedaries; a solitary acacia tree spreads its branches wide against the steel-blue sky; from between earth mounds and stones appears, eyes darting right and left, and then vanishes like a ghost, the gold-skinned lizard which, they say, never drinks water. In a hollow stand black tents of goat hair; a herd of camels is being driven homeward through the afternoon, the herdsmen ride on barebacked young camels, and when they call their animals the silence of the land sucks in their voices and swallows them without echo.

Sometimes you see glimmering shadows far on the horizon: are they clouds? They float low, frequently changing their colour

and position, now resembling grey-brown mountains—but in the air, somewhat above the horizon—and now, for all the world to see, shady groves of stone pines: but—in the air. And when they come down lower and change into lakes and flowing rivers which quiveringly reflect the mountains and the trees in their inviting waters, you suddenly, recognize them for what they are: blandishment of the jinns, the mirage that has so often led travellers to false hopes and so to perdition: and your hand goes involuntarily toward the waterskin at your saddle...”¹

The Road to Mecca covers Asad's life till the point of his departure from Arabia to India in 1932. His readers were left with a thirst for the remainder of his autobiography. He did start working on a sequel, *Home-Coming of the Heart*, which promised to unfold the rest of his active and fruitful life, but it was unfinished at the time of his death.²

Assessments of *The Road to Mecca*

The merits of *The Road to Mecca* were widely recognized when it appeared. The *Times Literary Supplement* said, “History tells us of many European converts to Islam, some of whom have risen to high place and power in the lands of their adoption...But it is rare to find a convert setting out, step by step, the process of his conversion; and doing this, moreover, in a narrative of great power and beauty...His knowledge of Middle Eastern peoples and of their problems is profound; indeed in some respects his narrative is at once more intimate and more penetrating than that of Doughty”.³ The reviewer of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote: “[This] book is one which has burst with strange and compelling authority upon the small fraternity of Westerners who know Arabia...a book trenchant with adventure magnificently described, and a commentary upon the inner meaning of Arab and Moslem life, helpful to all who would achieve a more accurate understanding of the Arabs

¹ Asad, *Mecca*, 12-13.

² After Asad's death, Pola Hamida Asad wrote that the sequel to *The Road to Mecca* was only partially completed by him and that she herself would complete it. It would be called *Home-Coming of the Heart*, “a title which he himself suggested”. Hasan Zillur Rahim, “Muhammad Asad: Visionary Islamic Scholar”, *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, September 1995, p. 46.

³ 24 December, 1954.

and their lands.”¹ “A very rare and powerful book, raised completely above the ordinary by its candor and intelligence...And what we gain is a cultural reorientation which should permanently affect our view of the world”, said the *New York Post*.²

Assuredly, *The Road to Mecca* is securely established in the canon of Arabian travel. It is also a challenging point of departure for a new mode of writing about travel in Muslim lands.

Asad's Contributions to the Debate on Islamic Ideology and Reform

Asad's versatile talents and thought also flowered finely in other directions, including Islamic law, *shari'ah*, and Islamic political theory. Both fields were of paramount importance to him as he felt that the spiritual and temporal success of the Muslim community, or *ummah*, depended largely on a correct understanding and application of Islamic law and on a sound political system.

He first started elaborating his ideas on the Islamic legal and political systems in the 1940s. His attention turned to these areas because as early as the 1930s he, along with Iqbal, began to work for the creation of Pakistan, where the Indian Muslims could realize their dream of leading their lives in accordance with the ideals and teachings of Islam. Asad was one of the distinguished English-writing thinkers who contributed to building the intellectual and ideological framework for the new Islamic state. Later he republished and developed some of his earlier writings on this subject in *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* and *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*. The former has been translated in other languages, including Arabic.

“[A]n Islamic state”, Asad posits in *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, “is not a goal or an end in itself but only a means: the goal being the growth of a community of people who stand up for equity and justice, for right and against wrong—or, to put it more precisely, a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of such social conditions as would enable the greatest possible number of human beings to live, morally as well as physically, in accordance with the natural Law of God, Islam”.³

¹ Blurb of *Mecca*, 1993 reprint.

² Blurb of *Mecca*, 1993 reprint.

³ Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, new edn. (Gibraltar, Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 30. (First published 1961).

Asad further believed that for a state to be Islamic it must be firmly anchored to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet. He also held that modern and future Muslims had considerable flexibility to deal creatively—through *ijtihād*, independent thinking—with an ever-changing world and its attendant challenges. But he believed that it was incumbent upon them when carrying out *ijtihād* to be bound at all times by the two fundamental sources of Islamic law: the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. He believed that in all matters which were clearly enjoined by the *shari'ah*, sovereignty belonged to God alone, but in most other areas, such as the form of the political system to be adopted, God in His Wisdom gave the believers the right, and imposed on them the duty, to exercise their reason to arrive at the appropriate decision for their time by mutual consultation. Asad laid great emphasis on the Qur'anic principle of consultation; he gave no quarter to totalitarian systems of government, which he thought were pernicious and anti-Islamic.¹ The emphasis that Asad and other reformers placed on *ijtihād* bore its fruit within his lifetime: several Muslim countries and international organizations have formed juristic bodies to exercise independent thinking in matters of contemporary relevance requiring guidance from the *Shari'ah*. Such issues range from organ transplants to genetic engineering, from interest-free banking to insurance.

Asad's readers are indebted to the dedication and industry of his Bostonian wife Pola Hamida Asad who presented us with an intellectual profile of her husband: she gathered together various writings and radio talks of his and persuaded him to publish them as *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*. Some of these had never appeared in print before. This book represents Asad's work and thought over forty years from the mid-1940s to 1987. In her foreword, she points out that the reader will be struck "not only by the extraordinary timeliness and timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their great consistency".²

This Law of Ours and Other Essays demonstrates Asad's lifelong fascination with a wide range of subjects which he deemed essential to bring to the attention of the Muslims. The book deals with Islamic and Western civilizations and Muslim law. In particular, it dwells on the role of *ijtihād* and the creative outlook of the Companions of the Prophet and the great jurists of the past such as 'Ali ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (d. 456/1064) and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) regarding the

¹ Cf. Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam", p. 60 and p. 62, where Asad denounces despotism in the modern Muslim world.

² Pola Hamida Asad, "Foreword" in Asad, *Essays*, p. xi.

necessity for independent thinking based on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. It also contains Asad's perspective on the ideological basis of Pakistan as well as on Islam's encounter with the West.

Asad was too cautious and scrupulous a thinker to propose a programme of reform built on the *Shari'ah* without constant refinement and attention to recalcitrant, practical detail and without voicing his views vigorously. "Simply talking about the need for a 're-birth' of faith is not much better than bragging about our glorious past and extolling the greatness of our predecessors", he says in *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*. "Our faith cannot be born unless we *understand what it implies* and to what practical goals it will lead us. It will not do us the least good if we are glibly assured that the socio-economic programme of Islam is better than that of socialism, communism, capitalism, fascism, and God knows what other 'isms'...We ought rather to be *shown* in unmistakable terms, what alternative proposals the *shari'ah* makes for our social life, what its true concept of society is, what views it puts forward with regard to individual property and the communal good, labour and production, capital and profit, employer and employee, the state and the individual; what its practical measures are for the prevention of man's exploitation by man; for an abolition of ignorance and poverty; for obtaining food, clothing and shelter for every man, woman and child..."¹

In another place, he returns to a central theme, the harmonious interaction between body and soul and between faith and deeds, which was one of the main reasons he was attracted to Islam: "...this religion of ours would not be God's Message to man if its foremost goal were not man's growth towards God: but our bodies and our souls are so intertwined that we cannot achieve the ultimate well-being of the one without taking the other fully into account. Specious sermonising about 'faith' and 'sacrifice' and 'surrender to God's Will' cannot lead to the establishment of true Islam on earth unless we are shown *how* to gain faith through a better insight into God's plan, *how* to elevate our spirit by living a righteous life, and *how* to surrender ourselves to God by doing His Will as individuals and as a community, so that we might *really* become the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind' (*surah* 3: 110)".²

¹ Asad, *Essays*, 69.

² *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Asad's Magnum Opus: *The Message of the Qur'an*

And it was God's last message to mankind, the Qur'an, which seized Asad both for a moment and for a lifetime—ever since that fateful Berlin subway ride on an autumnal day in 1926.

Many years of Asad's young and mature life were spent in contemplating the Qur'an's meaning and dreaming of producing a new rendering of the Holy Book with a commentary in the tradition of the great commentators whose scholarship enriched Qur'anic studies. Even the ten years that he had spent labouring on a translation of the entire *Sahih al-Bukhari* that was to be irretrievably lost in the waters of the Ravi were a necessary part of his attempt to comprehend the divine message: full familiarity with the Prophet's traditions was a requisite for understanding the Qur'an.

In *The Message of the Qur'an*, an English-language translation of, and commentary on, the Muslim Holy Writ, Asad realized his lifelong dream at the age of 80. Begun in 1960, a limited edition of the first nine *surahs*, or chapters, of the Qur'an was published in 1964, and the complete edition was published in a volume of 1,000 pages in 1980. It was the creative eruption that capped his scholarly contributions and long service to Islam.

The Holy Qur'an and its Translation

The Qur'an, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad some fourteen hundred years ago, is unique in the annals of scriptures. The Arabic Qur'an is the divine book to which more than one billion Arab and non-Arab Muslims look for guidance in their daily lives. It is recited privately, chanted publicly, studied extensively and memorized by young and old more than any other scripture. No other scripture has been solicited as frequently, day after day, by its readers for an answer to the all-important question: "How shall I lead a good life in this world and the world to come"? No other scripture has shaped its adherents or influenced world history to a similar extent. It launched the fastest-growing monotheistic religion and created the first ideological state. It made a single nation of warring tribes and diverse peoples and races and inspired them to channel their abilities into founding an enduring civilization that for many centuries was unrivalled in its literary, scientific, cultural, artistic and architectural and agricultural achievements. The contributions that civilization made during its

efflorescence helped the emergence of the Renaissance and the modern world in which we live.

As there were already some thirty renderings of the Muslim scripture in English, why did Asad undertake yet another interpretation of the Qur'an in today's premier international language? Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God revealed in Arabic and untranslatable into any other tongue. Can, therefore, the Word of God be adequately translated at all? What challenges face its interpreter and how can his success be measured? Furthermore, Asad not only rendered the Qur'an into English. He assumed another heavy burden: he also wrote a *tafsir*, or commentary, on it. But can any time-bound commentary penned by a mere mortal do justice to God's eternal Word? These are some of the questions which arise when considering the translation and exegesis of the Muslim Holy Book.

Traductor Traditor

A translator of any literary text is faced with two immediate problems: rendering the meaning of the original faithfully in a language that is idiomatic and in a style that resonates with the unique linguistic traits and flavour that are the particular grace of every language. Even the most "primitive" languages have an awesome beauty and richness of phrase that are untranslatable into "advanced" tongues. The problems of translation are alleviated when the two languages involved are cognate and have shared linguistic roots, literary traditions and cultural concepts, such as French and Spanish, which are both Romance languages ultimately derived from Latin. But even when translating from and into related languages with common traditions, it is extremely demanding to keep a balance between faithfulness to the original and felicity of expression in the translated version. The Latin adage, which dubs translators as traitors, *traductor traditor*, illustrates pointedly the age-old agonizing dilemma of the craft of translation.

In the case of rendering Arabic into English the problem is greater because of the vast gap that has to be bridged between the different syntactical, rhetorical, and linguistic worlds of Arabic, a Semitic language, and a Western, Indo-European tongue. As for the Arabic of the Qur'an the challenge to the translator is multiplied manifold for a variety of reasons. First of all the beauty and power of its language, rhythm and cadences are inimitable. Second, though Qur'anic diction is highly elliptical and condensed, and expresses a world of meaning with

pungent brevity, it is comprehensible to those who understand Arabic. But the translator of such elliptical constructions which are foreign to most other languages is forced to add linking phrases to clarify his rendering without resorting to a profusion of unwelcome interpolations into the Qur'anic text. Third, as the most vigorous extant Semitic language, Arabic has preserved a lot of the hard-to-translate everyday imagery of an ancient world. Fourth, and not least important, the Qur'an has coined numerous usages and terms to express new religious and moral concepts; it thus gave novel meanings to old, familiar words. For all these reasons, it is a formidable task for even the most talented bilingual scholars to translate the Divine Word into a language such as English.

Some English Translations of the Qur'an

The first translation of the Qur'an in a Western language was done by the English cleric Robertus Retenensis at the instance of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, for polemical reasons; completed in 1143, it was widely circulated in manuscript for several centuries in the Latin West and exercised a negative influence on the understanding of Islam in Europe. But the first English interpretation of the Qur'an by a European convert appeared only in 1930, fifty years before Asad's rendering. In his justly celebrated translation, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall expresses some of the difficulties inherent in any effort to translate the Qur'an: "The aim of this work is to present to English readers what Muslims the world over hold to be the meaning of the words of the Koran, and the nature of the Book, in not unworthy language and concisely...The Koran cannot be translated. That is the belief of old-fashioned Sheykhs and the view of the present writer. The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran—and peradventure something of the charm—in English. It can never take place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so".¹

¹ Translator's Foreword", *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall. A Mentor Book. 9th reprinting. (New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. vii.

Eternal Word of God versus the Ephemeral Word of Man

These are some of the problems confronting the translator. However, a commentator on the Qur'an faces additional difficulties. First, his qualifications must rank even higher than those of a translator in a variety of Islamic fields, ranging from Arabic linguistics to lexicography, *Hadith* to hermeneutics, history to heresiology, grammar to jurisprudence, rhetoric to dogmatics and phonetics to biography. Another serious choice that the Qur'an-commentator has to make is to decide which line of interpretation he wants to follow, for the science of Qur'anic exegesis is a rich one and has engendered many, at times differing, schools of interpretation. That this is so is only natural, for the Qur'an is pregnant with meaning and insights for those who contemplate it. Scholars have in every age scaled new heights in their understanding of the Qur'an, but their interpretations, however deep and however illuminating, remain a personal, human, partial perspective on the Word of God and His all-encompassing knowledge and have, therefore, not been considered binding on other scholars or on the community. The Qur'an is the Word of God, and hence immutable, perfect and eternal; commentaries by scholars are the work of men whose vision must necessarily be a reflection of their time, environment and personal bias, and hence subject to error and change. While the work of objective translators and commentators of the Qur'an deserves respect, it is not sacrosanct or above criticism.

Asad's Translation and Exegesis of the Qur'an

Among the recent Western interpreters of the Qur'an, Asad was certainly the most eminently qualified for the task. He had spent over three decades studying the Qur'an, the *Hadith* and other allied Islamic disciplines. He had lived in Arabia and gained familiarity with Arabic through daily contact with its people more extensively than any other Western translator of the Qur'an had ever done. He had been in contact with some of the most perceptive Muslims of his times. As an earnest convert, he treated the Qur'an's text with the veneration and humility of a believer and its message with the passion of an intellectual on a mission.

Of the primary aim of his translation, Asad says in the foreword to *The Message of the Qur'an*: "The work which I am now placing before the public is based on a lifetime of study and of many years spent in

Arabia. It is an attempt—perhaps the first attempt—at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Qur'anic message into a European language".¹

"But although it is impossible to 'reproduce' the Qur'an as such in any other language", he adds, "it is none the less possible to render its message comprehensible to people who, like most Westerners, do not know Arabic at all or—as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims—not well enough to find their way through it unaided".² With the humility of a confessing scholar, he says: "And I am fully aware that my rendering does not and could not really 'do justice' to the Qur'an and the layers upon layers of its meaning: for,

'if all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words, the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words are exhausted'.

(Qur'an 18: 109)".³

Another of the main aims³ of Asad's translation was to penetrate the veil that over the years has enveloped the meanings of some Arabic words due to semantic change and to reveal them in their original connotations at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. He documented these semantic changes by careful reference to the work of classical lexicographers and philologists and earlier commentators and thus brought a rare freshness and accuracy to his rendering. He was also helped in this effort by the "intangible communion" he had acquired with the spirit of the Arabic language through first-hand contact with its people. While not going along with the fashion of translating the Qur'an into a modern idiom that may jar the solemnity or nobility of the Sacred Book, he tried to minimize the use of archaisms.

In his exegesis, Asad was eclectic. He benefited from the great classical and modern Qur'an-commentators who represent a broad range of exegetical approaches. He acknowledges his debt to the commentaries of: Abu Ja'far al-Tabari (d. 310/923), whose encyclopedic *tafsir* is unparalleled in its scope, depth and primary importance; Jār Allah Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), the Mu'tazili rationalist whose work represents the culmination of rhetorical and syntactical analysis; Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi (d. 606/1210), the doyen of philosophical exegetes; the popular 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwi (d.

¹ Asad, "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. v.

² Loc. cit.

³ Asad, "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. viii.

ca. 685/1286), who condensed and amended al-Zamakhshari's rationalist interpretations; the comprehensive Abu 'l-Fida' ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), who represents the traditional approach to *tafsir*, and Muhammad 'Abduh, one of the outstanding scholars of modern Egypt whose exegesis was continued by his disciple Muhammad Rashid Riḍā (d. 1345/1935).¹ Asad also supported his interpretations by the use of the most authoritative lexicographical and philological resources, such as: Muhammad ibn Manzur's (d. 711/1311-12) *Lisan al-'Arab*, Abu al-Qasim al-Rāghib al-Isfahani's (d. 502/1108) *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* and Murtaḍa al-Zabidi's (1205/1790) *Taj al-'Arus fi Sharh al-Qamus*. The wealth of material that Asad quotes from classical authorities—starting with the Companion and cousin of the Prophet and the father of Qur'anic exegesis 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 68/ca. 686)—is one of the fortes of his rendering: in no other translation of the Holy Book in English there is as much commentation and interpretation from the giants of exegesis whose original work is normally accessible only to scholars of Arabic.

Though he was eclectic, Asad's bias is clear as is shown by the authority he most often quoted, the Mufti of Egypt Muhammad 'Abduh, whose great learning is unquestioned, but who did lean toward the rationalist school of al-Zamakhshari. This bias occasionally exposes

¹ The works on the history and development of *tafsir* are so numerous that only a few can be mentioned here. For the various schools of Qur'anic exegesis, see Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun*, 2 vols., 3rd impression (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1405/1985); Muhammad Ibrahim Sharif, *Ittijahat al-Tajdid fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim fi Misr* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1402/1982); J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974); Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, first printing 1920, rpt. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), trans. by 'Abd al-Halim al-Najjar as *Madhabih al-Tafsir al-Islami* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1374/1955); J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961); Abdul Khaliq Kazi, "The Growth of Exegesis" in the *Foundations of Islam*, eds. Zafar Ishaq Ansari and Isma'il Ibrahim Nawwāb (forthcoming UNESCO publication). A detailed treatment of al-Zamakhshari's interpretation of the Qur'an is Mustafa al-Sawi al-Juwayni's *Manhaj' al-Zamakhshari fi Tafsir al-Qur'an wa Bayan I'jazih*. 2nd edn. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968); for a preliminary introduction to 'Abduh, see 'Abd al-Ghaffar 'Abd al-Rahim, *al-Imam Muhammad 'Abduh wa Manhajuhu fi 'l-Tafsir* (Cairo: al-Markaz al-'Arabi li al-Thaqafah wa al-'Ulum, ca. 1400/1980). Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) can also be profitably consulted on the exegetical school of 'Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Riḍā.

Asad's translation to the faults that the followers of this school are heir to. What perhaps impressed Asad most about 'Abduh was that for the first time in the modern era a very erudite scholar and reformer viewed the Qur'an primarily as a book of divine guidance for Muslims in matters concerning their life in this world and in the Hereafter when many for a long period had regarded it merely as a source of theology or a model for illustrating the finer points of Arabic rhetoric or grammar.¹ Mentioning his high opinion of the Egyptian reformer's merits, Asad says, "The reader will find in my explanatory notes frequent references to views held by Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). His importance in the modern context of the world of Islam can never be sufficiently stressed. It may be stated without exaggeration that every single trend in contemporary Islamic thought can be traced back to the influence, direct or indirect, of this most outstanding of all modern Islamic thinkers".²

Yet, Asad at times maintained his intellectual independence and disagreed with his distinguished predecessors whenever he felt it was necessary to do so to elucidate his own interpretation. However,

¹ Cf. Sayyid Abu al-A'la Mawdudi's vision of the Qur'an's message and significance to human society. No other *tafsir* in the twentieth century was more methodologically rigorous in its emphasis on, and meticulous elaboration of, the Holy Book's relevance to all aspects of the Muslims' everyday life: personal, doctrinal, ethical, legal, social, political, educational, and economic. "The function of *Tafhim* is not to dwell primarily or mainly on literary beauties and legalistic niceties—which have not been ignored—but to develop an understanding of the Qur'an as the source of guidance", Khurshid Ahmad, "Foreword", *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, translation of *Tafhim al-Quran*, tr. and ed. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1408/1988), vol. I. pp. xiii-xiv. For Mawdudi, according to Khurshid Ahmad—whose knowledge of Mawdudi's thought is unsurpassed—the Qur'an "presents a message, invites the whole human race to a view of reality and society, organizes those who respond to this call into an ideological community and enjoins upon this community the necessity to strive for the socio-moral reconstruction of humanity, both individually and collectively". *Ibid.*, p. xiv. Despite the difference in the exegetical outlooks of Mawdudi and Asad, the latter shared a similar dynamic vision of the Qur'an not only with 'Abduh but also with Mawdudi and his kindred-in-spirit Iqbal, who opened his seminal work in English with an inimitable brilliant flash illuminating the Qur'an's challenging invitation to humankind: "The Qur'an is a book of 'deeds'..." Muhammad Iqbal, "Preface", *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, new edn., edited and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986), p. xxi. (First published in 1934 as *Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*).

² Asad, "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. v. note 4.

thorough scholar that he was, in such cases Asad was not unfair to other views than his own: he would mention the alternative interpretations in his notes and give reasons to explain his choices. "If, on occasion", he explains, "I have found myself constrained to differ from the interpretations offered by the [classical commentators], let the reader remember that the very uniqueness of the Qur'an consists in the fact that the more our worldly knowledge and historical experience increase, the more meanings, hitherto unsuspected, reveal themselves in its pages".¹

Elsewhere, Asad gracefully combines the personal and intellectual humility characteristic of inspired interpreters of the Divine Word with the promise of the perennial spiritual effulgence and the ever-expanding world of human knowledge beckoning to the devout exegete. "Whether one agrees or does not agree with my interpretations of this or that point, we should remember that even the great classical Qur'an commentators disagreed² on many details, thus increasingly deepening and widening our understanding of the Holy Quran.³ So it will continue, insha-Allah, until the end of time. This has been and will always remain the spirit in which I approach the Message of the Holy Quran infinite and the eternal heritage of the last Prophet. May God judge us all in His wisdom and mercy".⁴

¹ Ibid., p. vii.

² Asad is not referring here to differences regarding *nusus* ordinances [*ahkām*] which, "by their very nature, are not subject to conflicting interpretations; in fact, they are in no need of 'interpretation' whatsoever, being absolutely self-contained and unambiguous". Asad, *State and Government*, 12.

³ Asad mounted a spirited defence of his interpretations of certain controversial issues in "Clarification", *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, October 1981, p. 4. His main argument was that in every case where opponents raised objections to his views on such matters, he had solid authority in one or more of the prominent Qur'an-commentators, such as 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid al-Makki, Abu Jarir al-Tabari, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi and Muhammad 'Abduh.

⁴ Asad, "Clarification", *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, October 1981, p. 4. Cf. this with the views that Sayyid Abu al-A'la Mawdudi—one of the most influential scholars of the modern Muslim world—expressed in the introduction to his Urdu *tafsir*, *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (1950-1973). "The reader may rest assured that the Qur'an is not opposed to differences within the framework of a general agreement on the fundamentals of Islam and the broad unity of the Islamic community", writes Mawdudi, "Introduction", *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, I: 29. "For this kind of disagreement shows that a community is not lacking in the capacity for thought, for enquiry and investigation, for grasping or wrestling with the problems it faces...And it

The challenge of Qur'anic *tafsir* will continue to confront the scholars of succeeding generations. As did Asad, some of them will navigate their own length individual routes to reach the shores of understanding. Only time will tell which interpretations of the Divine Word are likely to benefit their readers. Certainly, only God can truly judge their ultimate worth.

But *The Message of the Qur'an* was not only a prodigious work of exegesis but also of translation into the international language of the day par excellence. Moreover, English was not Asad's mother tongue and his rendering appeared after *The Koran Interpreted* (1955), a two-volume elegant version by the versatile and fair-minded scholar A. J. Arberry (d. 1969), the doyen of orientalist translators of modern times. This reminds us of the Polish Joseph Conrad (d. 1924) who learned his English as a seaman but turned out consummate novels in English that, after a hundred years, are still fascinating. So, how did the Austrian Asad succeed in attaining the unattainable or translating the untranslatable? Asad's main concern in translation was to go beyond "the outer shell of literary matter"¹ and achieve clarity of expression in a befitting, idiomatic English while grappling to preserve as much as possible of "the ultimate beauty of expression"² that the Word of God represents in the original. "I make no claim", he says, "to having reproduced anything of the indescribable rhythm and rhetoric of the Qur'an. No one who has truly experienced its majestic beauty could ever be presumptuous enough to make such a claim or even to embark upon such an attempt".³ And, so, what is the critics' judgment on *The Message of the Qur'an*, his annotated rendering of the 'Qur'an in English? It received favourable reviews from discriminating scholars and English-reading general readers,⁴ Gai Eaton,

proves that the community is following the golden path of moderation. Such moderation preserves its unity by broad agreement on fundamentals, and at the same time provides its scholars and thinkers with full freedom of enquiry so that they may achieve fresh insights and new interpretations within the framework of the fundamental principles of Islam". Ibid., 30.

¹ Asad, "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. iii.

² Ibid., p. ii.

³ Ibid., p. viii.

⁴ In his *Islam in the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 122-123, Malise Ruthven—a non-specialist, educated freelance writer—has compared specific Qur'anic verses rendered by A. J. Arberry, 'Abd Allah Yusuf 'Ali and Asad for clarity and came out strongly in favour of the version by Asad. Three years earlier, he had paid a glowing tribute to *The Message of the Qur'an*: "...Muhammad Asad...has come as near as anyone to making the divine

a leading British Muslim thinker and author of *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, one of the major works which explore and illuminate many aspects of Islam, says of *The Message of the Qur'an* after pointing out some of the limitations of the rationalist approach: "In practical terms this is the most helpful and instructive version of the Qur'an that we have in English. This remarkable man has done what he set out to do, and it may be doubted whether his achievement will ever be surpassed".¹

But there will never be an unsurpassable rendering of the Qur'an. Asad himself, while pleased with this judgment, would not have accepted it in its entirety, for he believed that the Word of God could never be entirely encompassed by a translator or commentator and that, in the Qur'an's own expression, "the sea would indeed be exhausted"² before God's words were exhausted. In fact, had the meticulous Asad lived longer it is certain that he would have kept on improving his rendering, for as he said: "The longer I worked on this holy task, the more I realized how distant any human intellect is—and always will be—from a *complete* understanding of the Word of God".³ This is also borne out by comparing the verses he had translated in *The Road to Mecca* with the same verses when he came to render them in *The Message of the Qur'an*. Asad's translation, like all other Muslim translations of the Qur'an in any language, are sincere, dedicated—yet only transient and in no way completely satisfactory, attempts at interpreting what is essentially uninterpretable: the Word of God revealed in Arabic. Another translator of the Qur'an in English, 'Abd Allah Yusuf 'Ali (d. 1373/1953)⁴ perhaps summed it up best, when in reply to a question about the best English translation of the Qur'an—the young inquirer had expected Yusuf 'Ali to mention his own highly acclaimed and widely read rendering—said, "My son, the best translator of the Qur'an is Time".⁵

text intelligible to modern readers of the English language. That is an achievement for which future generations of Muslims and non-Muslims must always be grateful". Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam", p. 62.

¹ Gai Eaton, Review of *The Message of the Qur'an* in *Spectator*, 7 June 1980, p. 18. I am indebted to my friend Robert Arndt, the editor of *Aramco World* magazine, for obtaining the text of this review for me.

² "The Qur'an, 18: 109.

³ Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam", p. 62.

⁴ On 'Abd Allah Yusuf 'Ali, see M. A. Sherif, *Searching for Solace: A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Interpreter of the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1994).

⁵ Personal recollection of Haroon Nahaboo of Curepipe, Mauritius, told to the

Asad's Legacy to Posterity and his Views on Leading Muslim Reformers

What, and how lasting, is Muhammad Asad's legacy, one is bound to ask? It is no easy task to summarize his many astounding accomplishments without doing him injustice. Asad was the foremost Paladin of the *shari'ah* among Western converts. His life story, work and thought filled many educated Muslims with the fine aromatic spirit of his faith and genius. He was a man who received his chief nourishment from the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet and spent his energy on the preservation of the ideals of Islam and the identity of the Muslim *ummah*. He held that Islam's spiritual and cultural achievements remain across the centuries a brilliant and moving spectacle, but he was interested in Muslims carrying an aura not only of past glory but of continuing greatness and serving as a model for all nations.

Often he seemed to be ahead of his contemporaries in forcefully pointing up the necessity of a dynamic approach to solving the problems of the Muslims by the use of *ijtihad* based on the two ultimate authorities in Islam: the Qur'an and the authenticated traditions of the Prophet. He argued passionately that following this rugged path was the only way to ensure a successful revival in the Muslim world. In his insistence on the recourse to independent thinking he drew inspiration from such luminaries of the classical, medieval and modern periods as the second Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb (d. 23/644), 'Ali ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi (d. 606/1210), Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 598/1350), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1314/1897) and Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905). He was deeply respectful of the achievements of the great scholars of the past, but was critical of blind deference to individual opinions which according to Islamic principles cannot be regarded as infallible. He thought that all qualified Muslims were entitled and enjoined to exercise their judgment on a wide range of societal issues that arise in every age and had not been determined by divine revelation or authentic Prophetic traditions. In support of his position, Asad would frequently cite the Prophetic tradition that, if one exercised his judgment and was right, God would reward him doubly, but if he turned out to be wrong, God would still give him a reward. Today, many distinguished scholars

author in 1951.

endorse the concept of *ijtihad* enthusiastically.

Asad's disenchantment with secularism and materialism was the child of his very intimate, personal experience of the West. This disappointment was deeply felt, searchingly scrutinized and trenchantly expressed. The impact of his devastating iconoclastic critique of these trends reoriented many Muslims away from defeatism to pride in their Muslim identity and heritage. Asad's cautionary and trailblazing examination of the debilitating effects of secular and materialistic thought on society has led to the appearance of several excellent studies on the subject. Also, the predictions Asad made some sixty-five years ago on the effect of this thought on Muslims have not been wide of the mark.

Apart from very brief periods when he was part of a team, Asad always worked on his own. Though he held several leaders of modern Islamic reform movements in high esteem, he was too independent a thinker not to question their intellectual and political currency: he could not grind anybody's ideological or political axe. He never belonged to any organized movement, nor did he wish to form a socio-political organization to promote his reformist ideas. Part of this aversion of his was because Asad had little sympathy for the intolerance that often accompanies group partisanship; probably, he also felt that the consuming demands of organizational efforts had detrimental effects on creative writing. But because he was, and remained, an intellectual and never became an activist or a founder of a party, he did not leave any disciples who could carry on and develop his thought.

For the reasons just mentioned, Asad kept aloof from affiliating with the mainstream movements working for the common goal of Islamists: the resurgence of Islam. He, however, knew and respected the leaders of the major Islamic organizations and maintained amicable personal relations with them. He paid tribute to them when the occasion called for it but also spoke up in their defence or cried in lamentation whenever misfortune touched any of them. For example, though he disagreed with "certain points" of the Jamā'at-i Islami's programme, he thought of it as "a positive, legitimate movement". He considered the Jamā'at's founder, Sayyid Abu 'l-A'la Mawdudi (d. 1399/1979) "not only a great Islamic scholar but also a dear personal friend of many years' standing". He adds: "Although—as is clear from his and my writings—we did not concur on all points, our goal and objective was always the same: a deepening of the Islamic faith and Muslim culture". He also had great affection and admiration for Hasan al-Bannā (d. 1368/1949), who

launched in the late 1920s the Arab world's most powerful Islamic movement, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun. He considered al-Bannā "truly the greatest spiritual guide of our time, although his thoughts and his programme have often been deliberately misrepresented, in the Muslim world as well as in the West". Asad denounced strongly the execution of the gifted writer and Qur'an-commentator Sayyid Quṭb (1386/1966)¹ by Egyptian President Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir (1390/1970) whose "mindless and ferocious persecution of the Brotherhood" was behind this heinous act, which violated the lowest standards of decency and justice and stunned the entire Muslim world. "...I mourned his death as did every believing Muslim..."²

But Asad went beyond mere praise of persons he respected and public protest against the evil deeds of tinpot despots—whether they sprang up in the East or the West. He actively participated in supporting the Sanusiyyah movement in its heroic fight against Italian fascist colonialism in Cyrenaica. In 1931—towards the end of his sojourn in Madinah—he cooperated in a bold clandestine venture with Sayyid Ahmad al-Sanusi (d.1351/1933), the great spiritual leader of the movement. In response to the Sayyid's request and at great personal risk, Asad travelled incognito across the Red Sea and Egypt to the theatre of war in Cyrenaica. His goal was to offer assistance to the valiant and soon-to-be-martyred *mujāhid* 'Umar al-Mukhtār, who was trying to keep the last embers of resistance alive in what by then had become a futile attempt to stave off the extinction of the armed struggle against Mussolini's forces.³

Conclusion

Though Asad did not leave an organization or disciples, posterity will continue to benefit from his radiant thought through the written legacy he left in many fields: travel and autobiography, *sunnah*

¹ Some sources report the date of Quṭb's death erroneously. These are the correct, corroborated dates. 'Umar Riḍā Kahhālah's much-quoted *Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1414/1993) I, p. 804, mentions 1387/1967 and is obviously wrong; so is, in one place, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) chief editor, John L. Esposito, I, 307.

² All quotations in this paragraph are from Asad, "Clarification", *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, October 1981, p. 4.

³ Asad, *Mecca*, 312-343.

and *shari'ah*, jurisprudence and Qur'anic exegesis, secularism and westernization, political theory and constitutional law. Sadly, as is the case with most writings, which can only be a portrait of their author's age, Asad's, too, will eventually be dated. Asad's translations and interpretations of the Qur'an and *Sahih al-Bukhari* will in time be supplanted, his views on secularism and westernization will be re-examined and modified, his successful espousal of *ijtihad* will become *passé*, and his proposals for political and constitutional reform will be enacted. But one work of Asad's promises to escape the earthly oblivion that is the frequent fate of almost all human endeavour—his unequalled, dazzling masterpiece: *The Road to Mecca*.

But only God knows the future. Meanwhile, the passionate love affair of a great and splendid European with Islam is indelibly inscribed into the annals. For, once upon a time, two roads diverged in Berlin, and he, Muhammad Asad, took the one less travelled by. He took the road to Makkah—“and that has made all the difference”.¹ *

* * *

“NEVER AGAIN WILL YOU BE A STRANGER”!

An Anthology of Extracts from Muhammad Asad's Writings [1934-1987]²

Compiled and edited by Ismā'il Ibrāhīm Nawwāb

Unique as a person and gifted as a writer and thinker, a European convert to Islam, Muhammad Asad's literary and intellectual contributions spanned over half-a-century. He cast a wide, ambitious net and came up with a rare, rich catch. His writings included a spiritual odyssey, the classic *The Road to Mecca*—a magnificent stylistic and

¹ See Robert Frost's deceptively easy, memorable classic, “The Road Not Taken”, found in most anthologies of English verse.

* Reproduced with minor changes under the title “Berlin to Makka: Muhammad Asad's Journey into Islam,” published in *Saudi Aramco World*, 53/i (2002), pp. 6-32, including many photographs of Middle East taken by M. Asad in 1920; also reprinted in: Austria 2002 (Vienna)—Chaghatai).

² The transliteration of Arabic names and words and capitalization of terms derived from Arabic are not consistent in Asad's works, which were written over many years and published by various publishing houses. We are here quoting him without any changes. Where brief explanations are required to put an excerpt into perspective, they are placed within square parentheses, or, if needed, are footnoted. For the convenience of the reader, section headings have been added.

intellectual *tour de force* and period piece, with elegant narratives of powerful observation and daring adventures and with penetrating insights into the Middle East and Islam that often surpass those of such illustrious authors on Arabia as Sir Richard Burton, Charles Doughty, and T. E. Lawrence. His much-translated *Islam at the Crossroads* was a seminal contribution to the Muslim world's debate on modernization, westernization and identity. He translated, with explanations, from the Arabic portions of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, one of the best collections of the authenticated traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and wrote incisively on Islamic law and on the Islamic state. His life's work reached its scholarly culmination in his seventeen-year-long labour of love and research: his English rendering of, and commentary on, the meaning of the Muslim Holy Writ, *The Message of the Qur'an*.

* * *

From *The Message of the Qur'an* The Impact of the Qur'an

*Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created—
created man out of a germ-cell!*

*Read—for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One
who has taught [man] the use of the pen—
taught man what he did not know.*

With these opening verses of the ninety-sixth *surah*—with an allusion to man's humble biological origin as well as to his consciousness and intellect—began, early in the seventh century of the Christian era, the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, destined to continue during the twenty-three years of his ministry and to end, shortly before his death, with verse 281 of the second *surah*:

*And be conscious of the Day on which you shall be brought back
unto God, whereupon every human being shall be repaid in full for
what he has earned, and none shall be wronged.*

Between these first and last verses (the first and the last in the chronological order of their revelation) unfolds a book which more than any other single phenomenon known to us, has fundamentally affected the religious social and political history of the world. No other sacred scripture has ever had a similarly immediate impact upon the lives of the

people who first heard its message, and, through them and the generations that followed them, on the entire course of civilization. It shook Arabia, and made a nation out of its perennially warring tribes; within a few decades, it spread its world-view far beyond the confines of Arabia and produced the first ideological society known to man; through its insistence on consciousness and knowledge, it engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent inquiry, ultimately resulting in that splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its cultural vigour; and the culture thus fostered by the Qur'an penetrated in countless ways and by-ways into the mind of medieval Europe and gave rise to that revival of western culture which we call the Renaissance, and thus became in the course of time largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the "age of science": the age in which we are now living.¹



On Translating the Qur'an

...I do not claim to have "translated" the Qur'an in the sense in which, say, Plato or Shakespeare can be translated. Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Qur'an, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable—a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by all Arab scholars. But although it is impossible to "reproduce" the Qur'an as such in any other language, it is none the less possible to render its message comprehensible to people who, like most Westerners, do not know Arabic at all or—as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims—not well enough to find their way through it unaided.²

The Qur'an: "Its Own Best Commentary"

¹ "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus; London: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. i.

² Foreword, *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. v.

consequences which man brings upon himself by wilfully rejecting God's guidance and acting contrary to His injunctions. Some commentators (e.g., Zamakhshari) interpret this passage as follows: '...the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings—those who have not been condemned [by Thee], and those who do not go astray': in other words, they regard the last two expressions as *defining* 'those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings'. Other commentators (e.g., Baghawi¹ and Ibn Kathīr) do not subscribe to this interpretation—which would imply the use of negative definitions—and understand the last verse of the *surah* in the manner rendered by me above. As regards the two categories of people following a wrong course, some of the greatest Islamic thinkers (e.g., al-Ghazali or, in recent times, Muhammad 'Abduh) held the view that the people described as having incurred 'God's condemnation'—that is, having deprived themselves of His grace—are those who have become fully cognizant of God's message and, having understood it, have rejected it; while by 'those who go astray' are meant people whom the truth has either not reached at all, or to whom it has come in so garbled and corrupted a form as to make it difficult for them to recognize it as the truth (see 'Abduh in *Manār* I, 68 ff.)".²

*"Say [O Prophet]: This is my way: Resting upon conscious insight accessible to reason ['alā basīrah],
I am calling you all unto God—I and they who follow me"*

Asad comments on the just-mentioned verse thus: "It is impossible to render the expression *'alā basīrah* in a more concise manner. Derived from the verb *basura* or *basira* ('he became seeing' or 'he saw'), the noun *basīrah* (as also the verb) has the abstract connotation of 'seeing with one's mind': and it signifies 'the faculty of understanding based on conscious insight' as well as, tropically, 'an evidence accessible to the intellect' or 'verifiable by the intellect'. Thus, the 'call to God' enunciated by the Prophet is described in the above verse as the outcome of a conscious insight accessible to, and verifiable by, man's reason: a statement which circumscribes to perfection the Qur'anic approach to all questions of faith, ethics and morality, and is echoed many times in expressions like 'so that you might use your reason'

¹ Abu Muhammad al-Husayn al-Baghawi (d. ca. 516/1122). His commentary on the Qur'an is entitled *Ma'alim al-Tanzīl* (IIN's note).

² *The Message of the Qur'an*, 2, note 4 on *surah* 1: 6-7.

Firstly, the Qur'an must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as *one integral whole*, that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another. Consequently, its real meaning can be grasped only if we correlate every one of its statements with what has been stated elsewhere in its pages, and try to explain its ideas by means of frequent cross-references, always subordinating the particular to the general and the incidental to the intrinsic. Whenever this rule is faithfully followed, we realize that the Qur'an is—in the words of [modern Egyptian reformer and exegete of the Qur'an] Muhammad 'Abduh—"its own best commentary".

Secondly, no part of the Qur'an should be viewed from a purely *historical* point of view: that is to say, all its references to historical circumstances and events—both at the time of the Prophet and in earlier times—must be regarded as illustrations of the *human condition* and not as ends in themselves. Hence, the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular verse was revealed—a pursuit so dear and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators—must never be allowed to obscure the underlying *purport* of that verse and its inner relevance to the ethical teaching which the Qur'an, taken as whole, propounds.¹

* * *

Examples of Asad's Translation and Exegesis

The following are Asad's renderings of, and commentaries on, two Qur'anic verses. They reflect some of his translation and hermeneutical skills and provide a glimpse of the reach of his scholarship as well as the exegetical influences on him.

*"Guide us the straight way,
the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings,
not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go
astray!"*

Asad explains: "According to almost all the commentators, God's 'condemnation' (*ghadab*, lit., 'wrath') is synonymous with the evil

¹ "Foreword", *The Message of the Qur'an*, p. vii.

consequences which man brings upon himself by wilfully rejecting God's guidance and acting contrary to His injunctions. Some commentators (e.g., Zamakhshari) interpret this passage as follows: '...the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings—those who have not been condemned [by Thee], and those who do not go astray': in other words, they regard the last two expressions as *defining* 'those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings'. Other commentators (e.g., Baghawi¹ and Ibn Kathīr) do not subscribe to this interpretation—which would imply the use of negative definitions—and understand the last verse of the *surah* in the manner rendered by me above. As regards the two categories of people following a wrong course, some of the greatest Islamic thinkers (e.g., al-Ghazali or, in recent times, Muhammad 'Abduh) held the view that the people described as having incurred 'God's condemnation'—that is, having deprived themselves of His grace—are those who have become fully cognizant of God's message and, having understood it, have rejected it; while by 'those who go astray' are meant people whom the truth has either not reached at all, or to whom it has come in so garbled and corrupted a form as to make it difficult for them to recognize it as the truth (see 'Abduh in *Manār* I, 68 ff.)".²

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¹ Abu Muhammad al-Husayn al-Baghawi (d. ca. 516/1122). His commentary on the Qur'an is entitled *Ma'alim al-Tanzil* (IIN's note).

² *The Message of the Qur'an*, 2, note 4 on *surah* 1: 6-7.

(*la'allakum ta'qilun*) or 'will you not, then, use your reason?' (*a fa-la ta'qilun*), or 'so that they might understand [the truth]' (*la'allahum yafqahun*), or 'so that you might think' (*la'allakum tatafakkarun*), and, finally, in the oft-repeated declaration that the message of the Qur'an as such is meant specifically 'for people who think' (*li-qawmin yatafakkarun*)".¹

* * *

From *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* Praying for Guidance

Countless millions of Muslims pray to God five times a day: "Guide us the straight way—the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings". Thus, every one of them invokes the Creator on behalf of all men and women who are willing to believe in Him—"guide us"—and not merely on behalf of himself or herself alone: consciously or unconsciously, a Muslim who recites these words of the opening *surah* of the Qur'an is asking God to show the "straight" or "right" way to the community as a whole. In further analysis, this amounts to praying for guidance not merely in spiritual or ethical concerns but also in everything that pertains to the community's *practical* ways—that is to say, its social configuration and political behaviour.²

* * *

Differences of Opinion

Unavoidably, some of my conclusions will give rise to controversy; but I have always believed—and believe now more than ever—that without a stimulating clash of opinions there can be no intellectual progress in Muslim society; and that the Prophet's saying,

ikhtilaf 'ulama' ummati rahmah

"The differences of opinion among the learned of my community are a sign of God's grace", has a positive, creative value which has only too often been overlooked in the course of Muslim history—to the

¹ *The Message of the Qur'an*, 354, note 104 on *surah* 12: 108.

² "Author's Note", *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, new edn. (Gibraltar Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. v. (First published, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961).

detriment of Muslim social progress.¹

* * *

Science and Religion

No doubt science can, and does, guide us to a better understanding of the world around and within us; but, being solely concerned with the observation of the facts of nature, and with the analysis of the laws that appear to govern the interrelation of those facts, it cannot be called upon to deliver a verdict as to the purpose of human life and, thus, to provide us with valid directives as to the social behaviour we ought to adopt. It is only indirectly, through speculative reasoning on the basis of certain established facts, that science can attempt to advise us in this respect. But because science is always in a state of flux—always subject to the discovery of new facts of nature and, consequently, to an unceasing reinterpretation and revaluation of previously ascertained sets of facts—its advice is hesitant, spasmodic, and, at times, quite contradictory to previously tendered advice: which, in a nutshell, amounts to saying that science is never in a position to lay down with certainty what man should do or leave undone in order to achieve well-being and happiness. And for this reason science cannot (nor does it really attempt to) foster moral consciousness in man. In short, the problems of ethics and morality are not within the scope of science. They are, on the other hand, entirely within the scope of religion.²

* * *

The Islamic State and the *Shari'ah*

If we examine objectively the political ordinances of Qur'an and Sunnah, we find that they do not lay down any *specific* form of state: that is to say, the *shari'ah* does not prescribe any definite pattern to which an Islamic state must conform, nor does it elaborate in detail a constitutional theory. The political law emerging from the context of Qur'an and Sunnah, is, nevertheless, not an illusion. It is very vivid and concrete inasmuch as it gives us the clear outline of a political scheme capable of realization at all times and under all conditions of human life. But precisely because it was meant to be realized at all times and under

¹ "Preface", *State and Government*, pp. xi-xii.

² *State and Government*, 8-9.

all conditions, that scheme has been offered in outline only and not in detail. Man's political, social, and economic needs are time-bound and, therefore, extremely variable. Rigidly fixed enactments and institutions could not possibly do justice to this natural trend toward variation; so the *shari'ah* does not attempt the impossible. Being a Divine Ordinance, it duly anticipates the fact of historical evolution, and confronts the believer with no more than a very limited number of broad political principles; beyond that, it leaves a vast field of day-to-day legislation to the *ijtihad* of the time concerned.

With reference to the problem before us, one may safely say that there is not only one form of the Islamic state, but many; and it is for the Muslims of every period to discover the form most suitable to their needs—on the condition, of course, that the form and the institutions they choose are in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal *shari'i* laws relating to communal life.

These political *shari'i* laws...found their full expression in the administrative institutions and methods that prevailed at the time of the Right-Guided Caliphs—and therefore their state was Islamic in every sense of the word. However, we must not forget that in the unwritten constitution to which the Islamic Commonwealth conformed in those days, there were, side by side with the explicit *shari'i* laws relating to statecraft, certain other laws enacted by the rulers of the time in accordance with their own interpretation of Qur'an and Sunnah—that is to say, derived through *ijtihad*. Apart from these, we encounter in the period of the Right-Guided Caliphate many other administrative and legislative enactments which were neither directly nor indirectly derived from Qur'an or Sunnah but from purely commonsense considerations of governmental efficiency and public interest (as, for example, 'Umar's establishment of the *diwan*, or treasury office, after a Persian model, or his prohibiting warriors from Arabia to acquire landed property in the newly conquered territories). Inasmuch as such enactments were promulgated by the legitimate government of the day and were, moreover, not contrary to the spirit or letter of any *shari'i* law, they had full legal validity for that time. But this does not mean that they must remain valid for all times.¹

* * *

¹ *State and Government*, 22-24.

The Right of *Ijtihād*

Without in the least impairing our reverence for the Companions, we may safely admit that all findings obtained through *ijtihād*, by however great a person, are invariably conditioned by that person's environment and state of knowledge: and knowledge, especially in matters of social concern, depends not so much on the loftiness of a man's character as on the sum total of the historical experience available to him. There can be no doubt that the historical experience available to us is, without any merit on our part, very much wider than that which was available to the Companions thirteen centuries ago. Indeed, we have only to think of the immense development in the intervening centuries of so many scientific concepts in order to realize that in some respects we are even better equipped to grasp the inner purport of this or that socio-economic proposition of Islam than the Companions could possibly have been: simply because we can draw not only upon their experiences, but also upon the accumulated historical and intellectual experience of those thirteen centuries which, to them, still lay shrouded in the impenetrable mists of the future.

We should never forget that the message of Islam is eternal and must therefore always remain open to the searching intellect of man. The very greatness of the Qur'an and of the Prophet's life-example lies in the fact that the more our knowledge of the world progresses, the better we can understand the wisdom of the Law of Islam. Thus our right to independent *ijtihād* on the basis of Qur'an and Sunnah is not merely permissive, but mandatory; and particularly so in matters on which the *shari'ah* is either entirely silent or has given us no more than general principles.

It is obvious that our conclusions as to the best means of achieving administrative efficiency and safeguarding social equity are conditioned by the time and the socio-economic environment in which we live—and so, logically, quite a big proportion of the legislative enactments in an Islamic state must vary from time to time. This cannot, of course, affect those elements of legislation which are clearly ordained in the *nusūs* of Qur'an and Sunnah and are therefore unchangeable from the viewpoint of the believer; nor can it affect the essential proviso that all such variable, *non-shar'i* enactments must not run counter to existing, unequivocal *shar'i* injunctions. With all this, however, there can be not the least doubt that an Islamic constitution to be evolved thirteen centuries after the Right-Guided Caliphs may legitimately differ from

that which was valid in and for their time.

It is, however, not even necessary to visualize an interval of thirteen centuries in order to understand that the political requirements of one time often differ from the requirements in this respect of an earlier period. Even within the short span of a few decades, the Right-Guided Caliphs themselves varied their system of administration—or, as we would say today, the constitution of the state—in many a point. As an illustration, let us take the problem of choosing the head of the state.

There was, naturally, no difference among the Companions concerning the principle of elective government as such, for, as we shall see, the *shari'ah* is perfectly clear on the subject. However, although it is beyond doubt that the chief executive of an Islamic state must be elected, the Law does not specify any particular *method* of election; and so, rightly, the Companions regarded the method of election as something that lay outside the scope of the *shari'ah* and could, therefore, legitimately be varied in accordance with the best interests of the community. Thus the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, was elected by the chiefs of the *muhājirs* and *ansār*¹ present at Medina at the time of the Prophet's demise. On his deathbed, Abu Bakr designated 'Umar as his successor, and this choice was subsequently ratified by the community (ratification being, in this instance, equivalent to election). When 'Umar, in his turn, was dying, he nominated an electoral body composed of six of the most prominent Companions of the Prophet and entrusted them with choosing his successor from among themselves. Their choice fell on 'Uthman, who was thereupon recognized by the community as 'Umar's rightful successor. After 'Uthman's death, 'Ali was proclaimed Caliph by a congregation in the Prophet's Mosque, and the majority of the community thereupon pledged their loyalty to him.

Hence, under each of these four reigns which we describe as "right-guided", the constitution of the state differed on a most important point; for it cannot be denied that the method by which the head of the state is elected is a constitutional question of great importance. The different treatment accorded by the Companions to this question—with regard to both the composition of the electorate and the electoral procedure—shows that, in their opinion, the constitution of the state could be altered from time to time without

¹ In a footnote, Asad explains: "the *muhājirs* were the Meccan Muslims who accompanied the Prophet on his *hijrah*, or migration, from Mecca to Medina; the *ansār* (literally "helpers") were those who rallied to the Prophet on his arrival in their town".

making it any less "Islamic" on this account.

Apart from this, it is a mistake to believe that the endeavours of the Right-Guided Caliphs represented the *fulfillment* of all Islamic aims, including those relating to statecraft. Had it been so, Islam would be no more than a call to eternal repetition, for nothing would have been left to us but to imitate the doings of our predecessors. In reality, however, Islam is a call to eternal progress, socially as well as spiritually, and, therefore, also politically.¹

* * *

Objectives of the Islamic State

...an Islamic state is not a goal or an end in itself but only a means: the goal being the growth of a community of people who stand up for equity and justice, for right and against wrong—or, to put it more precisely, a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of such social conditions as would enable the greatest possible number of human beings to live, morally as well as physically, in accordance with the natural Law of God, Islam.²

* * *

From *Islam at the Crossroads* Asad's Early Interest in Islam

And now about myself—because the Muslims have a right, when a convert speaks to them, to know how and why he has embraced Islam.

In 1922 I left my native country, Austria, to travel through Africa and Asia as a special correspondent to some of the leading Continental newspapers, and spent from that year onward nearly the whole of my time in the Islamic East. My interest in the nations with which I came into contact was in the beginning that of an outsider only. I saw before me a social order and an outlook on life different from the European; and from the very first there grew in me a sympathy for the more tranquil—I should rather say, more human—conception of life, as compared with the hasty, mechanized mode of living in Europe. This sympathy gradually led me to an investigation of the *reasons* for such a difference, and I became interested in the religious teachings of the

¹ *State and Government*, 26-28.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

Muslims. At the time in question, that interest was not yet strong enough to draw me into the fold of Islam, but it opened to me a new vista of a progressive human society, organized with a minimum of internal conflicts and a maximum of real brotherly feeling...

The more I understood how concrete and how immensely practical the teachings of Islam are, the more eager became my questioning as to *why* the Muslims had abandoned their full application to real life. I discussed this problem with many thinking Muslims in almost all the countries between the Libyan Desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea. It almost became an obsession which ultimately overshadowed all my other intellectual interests in the world of Islam. The questioning steadily grew in emphasis until I, a non-Muslim, talked to Muslims as if I had to defend Islam from their negligence and indolence. This progress was imperceptible to me, until one day—it was in the mountains of Afghanistan—a young provincial governor said to me: “But you *are* a Muslim, only you don't know it yourself.” But when I returned to Europe once again in 1926, I realized that the only logical consequence of my attitude was to embrace Islam.¹

* * *

Falling in Love with Islam

...I have been asked, time and time again: “*Why* did you embrace Islam? What was it that attracted you particularly?”—and I must confess that I do not have any single satisfactory answer. It was not any *particular* teaching that attracted me, but the whole wonderful, inexplicably coherent structure of moral teaching and practical life-programme. I could not say, even now, which aspect of it appeals to me more than any other. Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other; nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking; and the result is a structure of absolute balance and solid composure. Probably this feeling that everything in the teachings and postulates of Islam is “in its proper place” had created the strongest impression on me. There might have been, along with it, other impressions as well which today it is difficult for me to analyze. After all, it was a matter of love; and love is composed of many things; of our desires and our loneliness, of our high

¹ “Foreword”, (1934), *Islam at the Crossroads*, rev. edn. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982), 9-11. (First published, Delhi and Lahore: Arafat Publications, 1934).

aims and our shortcomings, of our strengths and our weaknesses. So it was in my case. Islam came over to me like a robber who enters a house by night; but, unlike a robber, it entered to remain for good.¹

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Islam and Changing Times

History tells us that all human cultures and civilizations are organic entities and resemble living beings. They run through all the phases which organic life is bound to pass: they are born, they have youth, ripe age, and at the end comes decay. Like plants that wither and fall to dust, cultures die at the end of their time and give room to other, newly born ones.

Is this the case with Islam? It might appear so at the first superficial glance. No doubt, Islamic culture has had its splendid rise and its blossoming age; it had power to inspire men to deeds and sacrifices, it transformed nations and changed the face of the earth; and later it stood still and became stagnant, and then it became an empty word, and at present we witness its utter debasement and decay. But is this all?

If we believe that Islam is not a mere culture among many others, not a mere outcome of human thoughts and endeavours, but a culture-producing force—a Law decreed by God Almighty to be followed by humanity at all times and everywhere—then the aspect changes completely. If Islamic culture is or was the result of our following a revealed Law, we can never admit that, like other cultures, it is chained to the lapse of time and limited to a particular period. What appears to be the decay of Islam is in reality nothing but the death and the emptiness in our hearts, which are too idle and too insensitive to hear the eternal voice. No sign is visible that mankind, in its present stature, has outgrown Islam. It has not been able to produce a better system of ethics than that expressed in Islam; it has not been able to put the idea of human brotherhood on a practical footing, as Islam does in its supra-national concept of the *ummah*; it has not been able to create a social structure in which the conflicts and frictions between its members are as efficiently reduced to a minimum as in the social plan of Islam; it has not been able to enhance the dignity of man, his feeling of security, his spiritual hope—and last, but not least, his happiness.

¹ "Foreword", *Crossroads*, 11.

In all these things the present achievements of the human race fall considerably short of the Islamic programme. Where, then, is the justification for saying that Islam is "out of date"? Is it only because its foundations are purely religious, and religious orientation is out of fashion today? But if we see that a system based on religion has been able to evolve a practical programme of life more complete, more concrete and more congenial to man's psychological constitution than anything else which the human mind has been able to produce by way of reforms and proposals—is not just this a very weighty argument in favour of a religious outlook?

Islam, we have every reason to believe, has been fully vindicated by the positive achievements of man, because it has envisaged them and pointed them out as desirable long before they were attained; and equally well it has been vindicated by the shortcomings, errors and pitfalls of human development, because it has loudly and clearly warned against them long before mankind recognized them as errors. Quite apart from one's religious beliefs, there is, from a purely intellectual point of view, every inducement to follow confidently the practical guidance of Islam.

If we consider our culture and civilization from this point of view, we necessarily come to the conclusion that its revival is possible. We need not "reform" Islam, as some Muslims think—because it is already perfect in itself. What we must reform is our attitude towards religion, our laziness, our self-conceit, our shortsightedness—in short, *our* defects and not some supposed defects of Islam. In order to attain to an Islamic revival we need not search for new principles of conduct from outside, but have only to apply the old and forsaken ones. We certainly may receive new impulses from foreign cultures, but we cannot substitute the perfect fabric of Islam by anything non-Islamic, whether it comes from the West or from the East. Islam, as a spiritual and social institution, cannot be "improved". In these circumstances, any change in its conceptions or its social organization caused by the intrusion of foreign cultural influences is in reality retrograde and destructive, and therefore to be deeply regretted. A change there must be but it should be a change from *within ourselves*—and it should go in the direction of Islam, and not away from it.¹

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¹ *Crossroads*, 98-101.

**From *Sahib al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam*
The Duty of *Ijtibād***

The piety and the religious ardour of the Muslims may be lower in our days than in the earliest centuries of Islam; but certainly not our means of understanding. The interpretation given to the teachings of Islam by the Last Prophet will forever remain binding on a Muslim; but beyond this, he is free—in fact, *required*—to use his own intellect and his own conscience. This, and nothing else, was the attitude of the great Islamic thinkers whom we describe as *imams* (“leaders”). They never pretended to be infallible; they were learned men devoted to the search for truth, and they knew that the duty of thinking could never cease to be a duty for man. It was a duty for [early Muslim theologian and jurist] Abu Hanifah¹ as well as for [medieval Cordovan thinker and theologian] Ibn Hazm or [famous twelfth-century Spanish polymath, “Averroes”] Ibn Rushd; for al-Ghazali as well as for [renowned medieval religious reformer] Ibn Taimiyyah or for [eighteenth-century Indian theologian and reformer] Shah Wall Allah and it is a duty for you and for me.²

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**From *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*
Obligation to Think Anew**

...we must begin to think anew about Islam, about what it really signifies, what its real laws are; for we have stopped thinking about these matters for a good many centuries and have merely relied on what previous generations of Muslims thought *about* Islam. In consequence, our current theology (*kalām*) and canonical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) now resemble nothing so much as a vast old-clothes shop where ancient thought-garments, almost unrecognisable as to their original purport, are mechanically bought and sold, patched up and re-sold, and where the buyer's only delight consists in praising the old tailor's skill...

¹ Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man ibn Thabit (d. 150/767) undertook a critical analysis of the Islamic legal system, thereby founding the first of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence. (IIN's note).

² “Preface to the First Edition”, (1938), *Sahib al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. vii. (First published 1938)

We cannot go on like this at a time when the Muslim world is in the throes of a crisis which may make or unmake Islam's validity as a practical proposition for many centuries to come. Never was there a more urgent need for heart-searching and brain-searching. One does not require particularly sharp eyes to see that, set as we are in the midst of a rapidly changing world, our society, too, is subject to the same inexorable law of change. Whether we like it or not, a change there will be: it is, indeed, already being enacted before our eyes. The Muslim world *is* in transition—a fact that is as obvious as it is pregnant with tremendous possibilities for better or worse. For better or worse: since we must not forget that “change” is but another word for “movement”: and, within a social organism, movement can be creative as well as destructive. But whereas there is no power on earth which could now keep our society from changing, we are still free to determine the *direction* which this change should take: it is still up to us to decide whether we shall build our future on the real values of Islam—or entirely drift away from Islam and become passive camp-followers of other civilisations.¹

* * *

Criticism of Past Mistakes

Let us be honest with ourselves and admit that we have strayed far away; indeed, from the ideology provided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Ours is the old, old story of the rich man's son who has squandered his splendid patrimony and now wallows in the gutter. Centuries of intellectual lethargy, of dumb adherence to formulas, of the meanest internecine wranglings, of laziness, superstition and social corruption have dimmed almost beyond recognition the glorious promise held out by our beginnings. Centuries ago we ceased to exercise our wits in the search for knowledge, although our religion had enjoined it upon us as a sacred duty; we talked of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, of Al-Battāni and Ibn Ḥayyān—and, went complacently to sleep over their achievements. We talked about the wondrous social programme of Islam, about the equity and naturalness of its tenets—and all the while we flew at each other's throats, exploited one another or, alternatively, submitted in squalid contentment to every kind of exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous rulers. We always pretended to believe that the

¹ *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993), 11-12. (First published 1987).

Qur'an is a sure guidance in all matters affecting man's life—and nevertheless we grew accustomed to regard it as mere edifying literature, good enough to be recited in prayers and on ceremonial occasions and, wrapped in a silken *ghilāf*,¹ to embellish the upper-most shelves in our rooms, but not good enough to be followed in practice. We claimed that Islam is a religion of reason (which, in fact, it is)—and none the less we meekly agreed to, and sometimes even welcomed, suppression of reason by anyone who just happened to be in power: for most of our '*ulama*' were telling us that in matters of religion independent thought is heresy, and that only he can be a true Muslim who blindly repeats the formulas evolved in olden days (and evolved by scholars who were human, and therefore liable to err), like a parrot which has learnt its lesson once and for all.²

* * *

No Muslim Community is an Exemplar

There are many hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world today— but among all these millions there is not a single community that really lives according to the tenets of Islam; not a single community could show, as an example to the world, how Islam solves the social and economic problems which nowadays worry mankind so much; not a single community that could produce, in the realms of science, arts or industry, *anything* better than any Western community; or that could, culturally or politically, at least compete on equal terms with any Western community of comparable size. All the blustering talk of our past glories, all our assertions as to what Islam stands for, cannot change the fact of our present humiliation.³

* * *

Muslims and Foreign Ideologies

We must always remember that Islam is not concerned with

¹ Asad is referring to the permanent wrapping made of fabric that is sewn especially for casing copies of the Qur'an. It has been used in many Muslim societies not only as a sign of veneration for the Divine Word, but also to protect the Holy Book against wear and tear, particularly in earlier days when paper was scarce.

² *Essays*, 13-14.

³ *Essays*, 14.

spiritual principles alone: for, unless they have a counterpart in practical rules of conduct, spiritual principles lend themselves to most contradictory interpretations, and thus to a variety of social (or anti-social) conditions. A typical example of this can be found in Christianity, which contents itself with preaching beliefs and morals without bothering about their transformation into a definite *social scheme*, and so it remains content with being an accompaniment to a socio-economic state of affairs that has not the remotest connection with Christian ethics. But, unlike Christianity, Islam does not content itself with merely demanding certain spiritual attitude that could be adjusted to all manner of cultural, social and economic settings, but insists on the believer's accepting its own scheme of *practical* life as well. Within the framework of this scheme, which is called *shari'ah*, Islam has its own views on progress, its own definition of social good, and its own pattern of social relations. In the measure, therefore, that concepts borrowed from another civilisation and another outlook on life become dominant in the shaping of Muslim society, they deprive Islam of its function as a society-shaping power; and in the measure with which we willingly submit to such outside influences, we imply that Islam has no real claim to that function.

And this is the kernel of our problem. In the conscious and subconscious readiness of so many of our brothers and sisters always to imitate the social, political and economic forms of the West— even within the context of endeavours aiming at the re-establishment of a *really* Islamic polity— lies a silent, involuntary implication that Islam has no real claim to being a society-shaping power. Naturally so: for if our views as to how man should arrange his affairs are derived from sources other than Islam, we implicitly deny to Islam any right to dictate our scheme of life. The most one does concede to Islam in such a case (and the most that, in fact, *is* being conceded to it in many contemporary Muslim communities) is to provide a sort of spiritual music which may accompany our practical endeavours, but must on no account interfere with them!

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The *Shari'ah* is Binding; Jurists' Judgments are Time-Bound

As every student of Islam knows, only a part of the laws

¹ *Essays*, 16-17.

comprised in what today goes by the name of the *shari'ah* is derived from injunctions laid down in a direct, unequivocal manner in the Qur'an or in the Sunnah. By far the larger part of those supposedly *shari'i* laws is an outcome of the deductions and the subjective reasoning of the great *fuqahā'* of our past—deductions and conclusions, to be sure, conscientiously based on the context of the Two Sources, but none the less subjective in the sense that they were determined by each *faqih's* individual approach to, and individual interpretation of, problems not laid down unequivocally, in terms of law, in either of those Two Sources. Whereas the self-evident, unequivocal injunctions of both the Qur'an and the Sunnah are and must forever remain valid for us and cannot be subject to any amendment, no such finality and validity can legitimately be attributed to deductions and conclusions subjectively reached by *any* person below the Prophet. In other words, no subjective deduction, interpretation or conclusion touching upon any problem of law arrived at by means of the *ijtihad* (individual reasoning) of any, even the greatest, Muslim scholar can ever be binding on the community.¹

* * *

Ideological Foundations of Muslim Civilization

From the very outset, Muslim civilisation was built on foundations supplied by *ideology* alone. It has never had anything to do with the concepts of race or nation, and so it lacks the cement of racial or national homogeneity which was and is so decisive a factor in all other civilisations. Ours has always been an ideological civilisation—with the Law of the Qur'an as its source and, more than that, as its only historical justification. To speak of the Muslim *ummah* as of something politically justified and culturally valuable (and therefore to be cherished and defended) and, in the same breath, to question the importance of Islamic Law as the form-giving element in our life is hypocritical or, alternatively, an outcome of ignorance. For what values remain in that much vaunted *ummah* if we resile from its *shari'i* background? Certainly not a social philosophy worth the name: for that is based on the concept, derived from the *shari'ah*, of a divinely-willed order in human relations. And certainly not its ethics: for, the only political ideal which has distinguished the Muslims from the rest of mankind was the revolutionary concept of brotherhood united not by ties of blood or

¹ *Essays*, 23-24.

race but by their consciousness of a common outlook on life and common aspirations: a concept realised nearly fourteen centuries ago in the establishment of the Islamic *ummah*—a community open to every man and woman, of whatever race or colour, who accepted this common ideal, and closed to everyone, even one's nearest kinsman, who refused to accept it: in brief, a real "social contract".¹

* * *

Islamic Law Essential for Survival of Muslim Society

But whereas in other civilisations...it may be theoretically possible (although I personally doubt it) either to retain institutional religion or to discard it outright without destroying that civilisation's strength and continuity, we Muslims have no such alternative. For us, religion has never been just one of the contributing factors of cultural development: it has always been the very root and source of that development. So far as we are concerned, an elimination of religious thought and, specifically, of Islamic Law from the realm of economics, politics and social life would imply the *loss* of all cultural direction. Hence, in the measure that Islamic Law ceases to be a practical proposition in our day-to-day life, Islamic civilisation must necessarily become a contradiction in terms, and Muslim society a society of cultural mongrels and spiritual half-castes.²

* * *

The Detrimental Effects of *Taqlid*

In the purely intellectual field, the principle and the practice of *taqlid* into which the Muslim community has been driven opened the way to a most deplorable development: namely, that blind worship of "authorities" which has ever since pervaded Muslim society and was destined to have such a paralysing effect on Muslim cultural life in the past centuries. Similar to the "Fathers" of the Christian Church, we have in Muslim history that large (if not so clearly outlined) group of learned men as *ahl as-salaf as-sālih*—the "early, pious generations"—whom the Muslims have been taught to regard as almost infallible. By giving them a common designation, the illusion has been created that their views were more or less identical; but nothing could be farther from the truth.

¹ *Essays*, 29.

² *Essays*, 30.

Among those great and pious men, who certainly have rendered most valuable services to the cause of Islamic learning, there existed the deepest differences of opinion in almost all questions of importance. For, every one of those early scholars of Islam tried to reach, in the light of his own understanding, conclusions as to the Law-Giver's aims with regard to the moral and practical behaviour of the Muslims. Those conclusions were often contradictory—for, as I have repeatedly stressed—they were conditioned by the individual working of most diverse intellects and by the social environment and the philosophical notions of their own times. But most of the scholars of later generations, almost drowned in the oceanic width to which *fiqh* and *kalām* had attained in the course of a few centuries, resolutely refused to see the time-bound quality inherent in man's thoughts. They set themselves to the task of an artificial "harmonization" of the ideas expressed by the *ahl as-salaf as-sālih*, and made unquestioning reliance on their authority into a "postulate" of Islam itself. Since then, the overwhelming majority of Muslims have been practicing, and believing in the necessity of *taqlid*, and even scholars who by virtue of their training are in a position to reach independent opinions in the domain of Law, nowadays modestly reserve for themselves the right of *ijtihad* only on questions of minor detail within the framework of one or another of the established *madhāhib*.

Locked in habitual *taqlid*, Muslim intellectual and social life fell, from the fourth century A. H. onwards, into complete stagnation. Religious concepts ceased to be "conceived": they were simply taken over in a stereotyped form from generation to generation. Whatever error of thought one or another of the *ahl as-salaf as-sālih* might have committed was unquestioningly incorporated in the structure of conventional *fiqh*, and hardly a door was left open for later corrections. To the masses of common people this must have been very convenient. But it is almost incomprehensible how so many '*ulamā*' could have indulged in this orgy of blind imitation. It does not seem to have occurred to them that however great those "early generations" of Muslim scholars might have been, later times might bring forth intellects of equal brilliance which would have at their disposal not only all the material and all the scholarly apparatus which had been available to the "early generations" but would have, in addition, a greater amount of historical, psychological and scientific experience upon which to draw.

Under the impact of the principle of *taqlid*, clothed in the garb of veneration of the early scholars, the range of Islamic ideas was

forcibly limited to that existing in the first three or four centuries of Islam; and the justifiable respect which every Muslim feels for those great and righteous men of the past was made into a vehicle of, and an excuse for, intellectual laziness in problems of theology and law. In any other civilisation, this would have merely diminished the importance of religion as a form-giving element in social life: but in Islamic civilisation, which had been built on religious considerations and ideas to the exclusion of everything else, the petrification of religious thought was bound to suffocate the very spirit of life.¹

* * *

The Companions' Outlook on *Ijtihād*

It cannot be doubted that the Companions of the Prophet looked upon the observance of the *shari'ah* as the indivisible, guiding principle in a Muslim's life. We have already seen that whenever they could not find a *nass* ordinance illuminating a particular point of law in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah, they exerted their common sense in order to reach a legal decision which would conform to the spirit of the Law; but they never committed the mistake of regarding their own *ijtihād* as being valid for everybody and for all times. On the understanding that the Law itself was precise and obvious, they identified *fiqh* with a person's ability to exercise his intelligence in matters where no *shari'* provision was available. In admitting the possibility of legitimate differences in opinion—a possibility amply illustrated even in the earliest history of Islam—the Companions made a clear distinction between the Eternal Law of Islam, the *shari'ah*, and all time-bound legislation based on individual deductions from the Two Sources. If they ever considered *ijmā'* in this context, they did so only in the sense of an agreement on a particular course of action, and *not in the sense as to what should be law*: for to them Law, being based on *nass*, was self-evident and unequivocal and therefore required no interpretation, no *ijmā'*, no *qiyās*, no *rā'y*—in short, no *ijtihād* of any kind.²

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Enthusiasm of Indian Muslims for Pakistan

Some of you will perhaps...point to the great enthusiasm which

¹ *Essays*, 56-58.

² *Essays*, 63-64.

the Pakistan idea has created among the Muslims of this subcontinent. You will say—and rightly so—that the Muslims of India have at last awakened from their political torpor and have achieved a greater unanimity of purpose than ever before; that they have become fully conscious of having a separate cultural identity based on their being *Muslims*: that the foremost slogan of the Pakistan movement is *la ilaha ill'Allah*; that they are imbued with the desire to establish political forms in which the Muslim world-view, Muslim ethics and Muslim social concepts could find their full expression: and you will ask me, in a somewhat aggrieved voice, whether I count all this for nothing from the Islamic point of view?

As a matter of fact, I do not “count all this for nothing”; I count it for very much indeed. I do believe (and have believed for about fourteen years) that there is no future for Islam in India until Pakistan becomes a reality; and that, if it becomes a reality here, it might bring about a spiritual revolution in the whole Muslim world by proving that it is possible to establish an ideological, Islamic polity in our times no less than it was possible thirteen hundred years ago. But ask yourselves: Are the leaders of the Pakistan movement, and the intelligentsia which forms its spearhead, quite serious in their avowals that Islam, and nothing but Islam, provides the ultimate inspiration of their struggle? Are they really aware of what it implies when they say, “The objective of Pakistan is *la ilaha ill'Allah*”? “Do we all mean the same when we talk and dream of Pakistan”?¹

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Uniqueness of Pakistan Movement in the Muslim World: Its Ideological Basis

As far as the Muslim masses are concerned, the Pakistan movement is rooted in their instinctive feeling that they are an *ideological community* and have as such every right to an autonomous political existence. In other words, they feel and know that their communal existence is not—as with other communities—based on racial affinities or on the consciousness of cultural traditions held in common, but only—exclusively—on the fact of their common adherence to the ideology of Islam: and that, therefore, they must justify their communal existence by erecting a socio-political structure in which that ideology—

¹ *Essays*, 71-72. (Reproduced from *Arafat*, Lahore, May 1947).

the *shari'ah*—would become the visible expression of their nationhood.

This, and not a solution of the all-India problem of Muslim minorities, is the real, historic purpose of the Pakistan movement. In so far as there will always remain non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan as well as Muslim minorities in the rest of India, Pakistan cannot be said to solve the minorities problem in its entirety. But this is precisely the point which we—and our opponents—would do well to understand: the problem of minorities, however important in all considerations of India's political future, is, in itself, not fundamentally responsible for the Pakistan movement, but is rather an *incidental* accompaniment to the movement's intrinsic objective—the establishment of an Islamic polity in which our ideology could come to practical fruition. Only thus can we understand why the Muslims in, say, Bombay or Madras—who of course cannot expect their provinces would become part of Pakistan—are as much interested in its realisation as are the Muslims of the Punjab or of Bengal. They are interested in Pakistan not because they hope to come within its orbit in a territorial sense, but because they feel, as intensely as their brethren in the so-called "Muslim majority" provinces, that the birth of an Islamic polity in Pakistan would vindicate the claim that Islam is a practical proposition, and the Muslims—*because* of their being Muslims—are a nation unto themselves, irrespective of their geographical location. And if non-Muslims object to this claim on the grounds that nowhere else in the world—not even in the rest of the Muslim world—does any group of people nowadays aspire to separate nationhood by virtue of its religious beliefs alone, we are entitled to answer them: "In that case, we are unique. So what?"

So what? Should we concede to others the right to decide what should and what should not constitute our nationhood? Should we be ashamed of the fact that our political ideals are entirely different from the present-day ideals of the Turks, the Egyptians, the Afghans, the Syrians or the Iranians? Should we not, rather, derive pride from the thought that we alone among Muslim peoples are now finding the way back to the concept of the *ummah* enunciated by the Greatest Man?

For, in this respect, the Pakistan movement is truly unique among all the political mass movements now evident anywhere in the Muslim world. No doubt, in the vast territories that go by this name there are many other lovers of Islam besides us; in almost every Muslim country there are selfless people who endeavour to propagate the Prophet's teachings and to raise the moral level of the community: but nowhere in the modern world, except in the Pakistan movement, has a

whole Muslim nation set out on the march towards Islam. No mass movement anywhere else in the Muslim world owes its origin to a similar, Islamic inspiration on the part of the people; nor has any of the existing Muslim states a similar objective in view. Some of those states...are explicitly anti-Islamic in their governmental aims, and openly declare that Islam should be eliminated from politics and from the people's social life. But even those Muslim states in which religion is still being valued—in varying degrees—as a spiritual treasure, are “Islamic” only in so far as Islam is the religion professed by the majority of their inhabitants: while their political aims are not really governed by Islamic considerations but, rather, by what the rulers or ruling classes conceive as “national” interests in exactly the sense in which national interests are conceived in the West. It is, therefore, impossible to expect of such political organisations...any clear impetus in the direction of Islam. This does not, of course, mean that all the people or even the rulers of those countries are indifferent to Islam as such: it means no more and no less than that their attachment to Islam—genuine in many cases—has, for various historical reasons, no direct relation to the forms of their states and the aims of their governments.¹

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Dangers Facing Pakistan

It is...quite legitimate to say that the Pakistan movement contains a great promise for an Islamic revival; and as far as I can see, it offers almost the only hope of such a revival in a world that is rapidly slipping away from the ideals of Islam. But the hope is justified only so long as our leaders, and the masses with them, keep the true objective of Pakistan in view, and do not yield to the temptation to regard their movement as just another of the many “national” movements so fashionable in the present day Muslim world—a danger which, I believe is very imminent. I do not mean a nationalism based on racial lines, as we see it elsewhere (for such a tendency is impossible among Indian Muslims who, as a community, are composed of most diverse racial elements): but there is an acute danger of the Pakistan movement being deflected from its ideological course by laying too much stress on a “cultural” nationalism—on a community of interests arising not so much from a common ideology as from the desire to preserve certain

¹ *Essays*, 74-76. (Reproduced from *Arafat*, Lahore, May 1947).

cultural traits, social habits and customs and, last but not least, to safeguard the economic development of a group of people who happen to be "Muslims" only by virtue of their birth. Nobody can doubt that the cultural traditions and the immediate economic requirements of the Muslim community are extremely important in our planning the Muslim future on Islamic lines. But this is just the point: they should never be viewed independently of our ideological goal—the building of our future on Islamic lines.

It appears, however, that the majority of our intelligentsia are about to commit just this mistake. When they talk of Pakistan, they often convey the impression that the "actual" interests of the Muslim world could be viewed independently of what is described as the "purely ideological" interests of Islam; in other words, that it is possible to be a good Pakistani without being *primarily* interested in Islam as the basic reality in one's own and in the community's life.

I hope that my readers will agree with me that such an arbitrary division between "Muslim" and "Islamic" interests is sheer nonsense. Islam is not just one among several characteristics of Muslim communal existence, but its only historical cause and justification: and to consider Muslim interests as something apart from Islam is like considering a living being as something apart from the fact of its life. But however nonsensical such an attitude may appear to be a thinking person, there is no going round the fact that most people (not excluding most of our intelligentsia) are in the habit of never thinking at all....¹

* * *

The Soul and Body: No Bifurcation in Islam

Starting with the premises that all life is God-willed and, therefore, positive, Islam implicitly refuses to draw a dividing-line between man's "soul" and his "body" in the sense of their being an inherent conflict between his physical, emotional and spiritual requirements. In other words, Islam teaches us that we need not despise our sensual urges in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment. By virtue of man's nature, body and soul are to be regarded as mutually complementary, equally valid elements of the entity described as "the human personality," and the fact of their coexistence and inseparability is conceived as the natural basis of human life as such. In this way, Islam

¹ *Essays*, 76-77. (Reproduced from *Arafat*, Lahore, May 1947).

enables man to participate in all manner of worldly activities as well as go through the whole range of his own bodily needs and urges—and at the same time to remain conscious of the moral imperatives to which all that worldly life and all those urges and emotions must be subordinated. Thus, the innermost purpose of the Islamic message consists in guiding the *whole* human being to a form of existence in which both his spiritual desires and his legitimate physical and social urges could find a maximum of fulfillment without offending against the rights or feelings of other human beings. Man's desire to live as fully as possible in his body as well as in his spirit is not only recognised as a *positive* instinct but is even endowed with the quality of an ethical postulate: that is to say, man is not merely *allowed* to make the fullest possible use of his God-given life on earth, but is *duty-bound* to strive for it. Consequently, the Qur'an explicitly rejects every form of self-mortification and exaggerated asceticism: and the Prophet Muhammad summed up, as it were, this Qur'anic teaching in his famous saying, "There is no world-denial (*rabbāniyyah*, lit., "monkishness") in Islam." Without doubt, both the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet are full of admonitions not to ascribe undue importance to our earthly life and always to remain conscious that this life is no more than the *first* stage of human existence: but precisely because it is the first—and therefore the formative—stage, man is enjoined to utilise all its positive, legitimate possibilities to the full, and thus to become really worthy of the bliss which awaits the righteous in the life to come. Hence, a Muslim is aware that he does not offend against the true faith if he—or she—finds pleasure, with moderation and dignity, in the beautiful things of the world of matter: for, in the words of the Prophet Muhammad, "God loves to see on his worshippers signs of His grace".¹

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From *The Road to Mecca* The West and other Civilizations

Accustomed as he is to writings which depict the culture or discuss the problems of his own civilization in great detail and in vivid colours, with little more than side glances here and there at the rest of the world, the average European or American easily succumbs to the illusion that the cultural experiences of the West are not merely superior

¹ *Essays*, 131-132.

but out of all proportion to those of the rest of the world; and thus, that the Western way of life is the only valid norm by which other ways of life could be adjudged—implying, of course, that every intellectual concept, social institution or ethical valuation at disagrees with the Western 'norm' belongs *eo ipso* to a lower grade of existence. Following in the footsteps of the Greeks and Romans, the Occidental likes to think that all those 'other' civilizations are or were only so many stumbling experiments on the path of progress so unerringly pursued by the West; or, at best, (as in the case of the 'ancestor' civilizations which preceded that of the modern West in a direct line), no more than consecutive chapters in one and the same book, of which Western civilization is, of course, the final chapter.¹

* * *

The Majesty of the Desert

Life in its majesty: majesty of sparseness, always surprising: herein lies the whole nameless scent of Arabia, of sand deserts like this one, and of the many other changing landscapes.

Sometimes, it is lava ground, black and jagged; sometimes dunes without end; sometimes a *wādi* between rocky hills, covered with thornbushes out of which a startled hare jumps across your way; sometimes loose sand with tracks of gazelles and a few fire-blackened stones over which long-forgotten wayfarers cooked their food in long-forgotten days; sometimes a village beneath palm trees and the wooden wheels over the wells make music and sing to you without stopping; sometimes a well in the midst of a desert valley, with beduin herdsmen bustling around it to water their thirsty sheep and camels--they chant in chorus while the water is drawn up in large leather buckets and poured with a rush into leather troughs to the delight of the excited animals. Then again, there is loneliness in steppes overcome by a sun without mercy; patches of hard, yellow grass and leafy bushes that crawl over the ground with snaky branches offer welcome pasture to your dromedaries; a solitary acacia tree spreads its branches wide against the steel-blue sky; from between earth mounds and stones appears, eyes darting right and left, and then vanishes like a ghost, the gold-skinned lizard which, they say, never drinks water. In a hollow stand black tents of goat hair; a herd of camels is being driven homeward through the afternoon, the

¹ *The Road to Mecca* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1954; many reprints), 3.

herdsmen ride on barebacked young camels, and when they call their animals the silence of the land sucks in their voices and swallows them without echo.

Sometimes you see glimmering shadows far on the horizon—are they clouds? They float low, frequently changing their colour and position, now resembling grey-brown mountains—but in the air, somewhat above the horizon—and now, for all the world to see, shady groves of stone pines: but—in the air. And when they come down lower and change into lakes and flowing rivers which quiveringly reflect the mountains and the trees in their inviting waters, you suddenly recognize them for what they are: blandishment of the jinns, the mirage that has so often led travellers to false hopes and so to perdition: and your hand goes involuntarily toward the waterskin at your saddle...¹

* * *

Elsa

In the starlit silence of the desert, with a tender, lukewarm wind rippling the sands, the images of past and present intertwine, separate again and call to one another with wondrous sounds of evocation, backward through the years, back to the beginning of my Arabian years, to my first pilgrimage to Mecca and the darkness that overshadowed those early days: to the death of the woman [Asad's first wife, Elsa] whom I loved as I have loved no woman since and who now lies buried under the soil of Mecca, under a simple stone without inscription that marks the end of her road and the beginning of a new one for me: an end and a beginning, a call and an echo, strangely intertwined in the rocky valley of Mecca...²

* * *

The Home-Coming of the Heart

My coming to this land was it not, in truth, a home-coming? Home-coming of the heart that has espied its old home backward over a curve of thousands of years and now recognizes this sky, my sky, with painful rejoicing? For this Arabian sky—so much darker, higher, more festive with its stars than any other sky--vaulted over the long trek of my ancestors, those wandering herdsmen-warriors, when, thousands of

¹ *Mecca*, 13-14.

² *Mecca*, 40.

years ago, they set out in the power of their morning, obsessed by greed for land and booty, toward the fertile country of Chaldea and an known future: that small beduin tribe of Hebrews, forefathers of that man who was to be born in Ur of the Chaldees.¹

* * *

Muslim Worship in Jerusalem

During that autumn [in the early 1920s] I was living in my uncle Dorian's house just inside the Old City of Jerusalem. It rained almost every day and, not being able to go out much, I often sat at the window which overlooked a large yard behind the house. This yard belonged to an old Arab who was called *hāji* because he had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca; he rented out donkeys for riding and carrying and thus made the yard a kind of caravanserai.

Every morning, shortly before dawn, loads of vegetables and fruits were brought there on camels from the surrounding villages and sent out on donkeys into the narrow bazaar streets of the town. In daytime the heavy bodies of the camels could be seen resting on the ground; men were always noisily attending to them and to the donkeys, unless they were forced to take refuge in the stables from the streaming rain. They were poor, ragged men, those camel and donkey drivers, but they behaved like great lords. When they sat together at meals on the ground and ate flat loaves of wheat bread with a little bit of cheese or a few olives, I could not but admire the nobility and ease of their bearing and their inner quiet: you could see that they had respect for themselves and the everyday things of their lives. The *hāji*, hobbling around on a stick—for he suffered from arthritis and had swollen knees—was a kind of chieftain among them; they appeared to obey him without question. Several times a day he assembled them for prayer and, if it was not raining too hard, they prayed in the open: all the men in a single, long row and he as their *imam* in front of them. They were like soldiers in the precision of their movements—they would bow together in the direction of Mecca, rise again, and then kneel down and touch the ground with their foreheads; they seemed to follow the inaudible words of their leader, who between the prostrations stood barefoot on his prayer carpet, eyes closed, arms folded over his chest, soundlessly moving his lips and obviously lost in deep absorption: you could see that

¹ *Mecca*, 49.

he was praying with his whole soul.

It somehow disturbed me to see so real a prayer combined with almost mechanical body movements, and one day I asked the *haji*, who understood a little English:

‘Do you really believe that God expects you to show Him your respect by repeated bowing and kneeling and prostration? Might it not be better only to look into oneself and to pray to Him in the stillness of one’s heart? Why all these movements of your body?’

As soon as I had uttered these words I felt remorse, for I had not intended to injure the old man’s religious feelings. But the *haji* did not appear in the least offended. He smiled with his toothless mouth and replied:

‘How else then should we worship God? Did He not create both, soul and body, together? And this being so, should man not pray with his body as well as with his soul? Listen, I will tell you why we Muslims pray as we pray. We turn toward the Kaaba, God’s holy temple in Mecca, knowing that the faces of all Muslims, wherever they may be, are turned to it in prayer, and that we are like one body, with Him as the centre of our thoughts. First we stand upright and recite from the Holy Qur’an, remembering that it is His Word, given to man that he may be upright and steadfast in life. Then we say, “God is the Greatest”, reminding ourselves that no one deserves to be worshipped but Him; and bow down deep because we honour Him above all, and praise His power and glory. Thereafter we prostrate ourselves on our foreheads because we feel that we are but dust and nothingness before Him, and that He is our Creator and Sustainer on high. Then we lift our faces from the ground and remain sitting, praying that He forgive us our sins and bestow His grace upon us, and guide us aright, and give us health and sustenance. Then we again prostrate ourselves on the ground and touch the dust with our foreheads before the might and the glory of the One. After that, we remain sitting and pray that He bless the Prophet Muhammad who brought His message to us, just as He blessed the earlier Prophets; and that He bless us as well, and all those who follow the right guidance; and we ask Him to give us of the good of this world and of the good of the world to come. In the end we turn our heads to the right and to the left, saying, “Peace and the grace of God be upon you”--and thus greet all who are righteous, wherever they may be.

‘It was thus that our Prophet used to pray and taught his followers to pray for all times, so that they might willingly surrender themselves to God—which is *what Islam* means—and so be at peace

with Him and with their own destiny'.

The old man did not, of course, use exactly these words, but this was their meaning, and this is how I remember them. Years later I realized that with his simple explanation the *hajji* had opened to me the first door to Islam; but even then, long before any thought that Islam might become my own faith entered my mind, I began to feel an unwonted humility whenever I saw, as I often did, a man standing barefoot on his prayer rug, or on a straw mat, or on the bare earth, with his arms folded over his chest and his head lowered, entirely submerged within himself, oblivious of what was going on around him, whether it was in a mosque or on the sidewalk of a busy street: a man at peace with himself.¹

* * *

Encounter with Chaim Weizmann

Although of Jewish origin myself, I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism. Apart from my personal sympathy for the Arabs, I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a foreign Great Power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining to majority in [Palestine] and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been since time immemorial. Consequently, I was inclined to take the side of the Arabs whenever the Jewish-Arab question was brought up—which, of course, happened very often. This attitude of mine was beyond the comprehension of practically all the Jews with whom I came in contact during those months. They could not understand what I saw in the Arabs who, according to them, were no more than a mass of backward people whom they looked upon with a feeling not much different from that of the European settlers in Central Africa. They were not in the least interested in what the Arabs thought; almost none of them took pains to learn Arabic; and everyone accepted without question the dictum that Palestine was the rightful heritage of the Jews.

I still remember a brief discussion I had [in Jerusalem in 1922] on this score with Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the undisputed leader of the Zionist movement.² He had come on one of his periodic visits to

¹ *Mecca*, 87-89.

² Chaim Azriel Weizmann (1874-1952), who later was to become Israel's first president, was the Zionist leader who played a crucial role in securing from the British government the Balfour Declaration which prepared the way for the

Palestine (his permanent residence was, I believe, in London), and I met him in the house of a Jewish friend. One could not but be impressed by the boundless energy of this man—an energy that manifested itself even in his bodily movements, in the long, springy stride with which he paced up and down the room—and by the power of intellect revealed in the broad forehead and the penetrating glance of his eyes.

He was talking of the financial difficulties which were besetting the dream of a Jewish National Home, and the insufficient response to this dream among people abroad; and I had the disturbing impression that even he, like most of the other Zionists, was inclined to transfer the moral responsibility for all that happening in Palestine to the 'outside world'. This impelled me to break through the deferential hush with which all the other people present were listening to him, and to ask:

'What about the Arabs?'

I must have committed a *faux pas* by thus bringing a jarring note into the conversation, for Dr. Weizmann turned his face slowly toward me, put down the cup he had been holding in his hand, and repeated my question:

'What about the Arabs...?'

'Well—now can you ever hope to make Palestine your homeland in the face of the vehement opposition of the Arabs, who after all, are in the majority in this country?'

The Zionist leader shrugged his shoulders and answered drily: 'We expect they won't be in a majority after a few years'.

'Perhaps so. You have been dealing with this problem for years and must know the situation better than I do. But quite apart from the political difficulties which Arab opposition may or may not put in your way—does not the moral aspect of the question ever bother you? Don't you think that it is wrong on your part to displace the people who have always lived in this country?'

'But it is *our* country', replied Dr. Weizmann, raising his eyebrows. 'We are doing no more than taking back what we have been wrongly deprived of'.

'But you have been away from Palestine for nearly two thousand years! Before that you had ruled this country, and hardly ever the whole of it, for less than five hundred years. Don't you think that the Arabs could, with equal justification, demand Spain for themselves—for, after all, they held sway in Spain for nearly seven hundred years and lost it

establishment of a Jewish state in Arab Palestine. (IIN's note).

entirely only five hundred years ago'?

Dr. Weizmann had become visibly impatient: 'Nonsense. The Arabs had only *conquered* Spain; it had never been their original homeland, and so it was only right that in the end they were driven out by the Spaniards'.

'Forgive me', I retorted, 'but it seems to me that there is some historical oversight here. After all, the Hebrews also came as conquerors to Palestine. Long before them were many other Semitic and non-Semitic tribes settled here—the Amorites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Hittites. Those tribes continued living here even in the days of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They continued living here after the Romans drove our ancestors away. They are living here today. The Arabs who settled in Syria and Palestine after their conquest in the seventh century were always only a small minority of the population; the rest of what we describe today as Palestinian or Syrian "Arabs" are in reality only the Arabianized, original inhabitants of the country. Some of them became Muslims in the course of centuries, others remained Christians; the Muslims naturally inter-married with their co-religionists from Arabia. But can you deny that the bulk of those people in Palestine, who speak Arabic, whether Muslims or Christians, are direct-line descendants of the original inhabitants: original in the sense of having lived in this country before the Hebrews came to it'?

Dr. Weizmann smiled politely at my outburst and turned the conversation to other topics.

I did not feel happy about the outcome of my intervention. I had of course not expected any of those present—least of all Dr. Weizmann himself—to subscribe to my conviction that the Zionist idea was highly vulnerable on the moral plane: but I had hoped that my defence of the Arab cause would at least give rise to some sort of uneasiness on the part of the Zionist leadership—an uneasiness which might bring about more introspection and thus, perhaps, a greater readiness to admit the existence of a possible moral right in the opposition of the Arabs...None of this had come about. Instead, I found myself facing a blank wall of staring eyes: a censorious disapproval of my temerity, which dared question the unquestionable right of the Jews to the land of their forefathers...

How was it possible, I wondered, for people endowed with so much creative intelligence as the Jews to think of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms alone? Did they not realize that the problem of the Jews in Palestine could, in the long run, be solved only through

friendly co-operation with the Arabs? Were they so hopelessly blind to the painful future which their policy must bring?—to the struggles, the bitterness and the hatred to which the Jewish island, even if temporarily successful, would forever remain exposed in the midst of a hostile Arab sea?

And how strange, I thought, that a nation which had suffered so many wrongs in the course of its long and sorrowful diaspora¹ was now, in single-minded pursuit of its goal, ready to inflict a grievous wrong on another nation—and a nation, too, that was innocent of all that past Jewish suffering. Such a phenomenon, I knew, was not unknown to history; but it made me, none the less, very sad to see it enacted before my eyes.²

* * *

The Call to Prayer in Cairo

Opposite my house [in Cairo], so close that you could almost touch it, stood a little mosque with a tiny minaret from which five times a day the call to prayer was sounded. A white-turbaned man would appear on the gallery, raise his hands, and begin to chant: '*Allahu akbar*—God is the Greatest! And I bear witness that Muhammad is God's Messenger...' As he slowly turned toward the four points of the compass, the ring of his voice climbed upward, grew into the clear air, rocking on the deep, throaty sounds of the Arabic language, swaying, advancing and retreating. The voice was a dark baritone, soft and strong, capable of a great range; but you could perceive that it was fervour and not an art that made it beautiful.

This chant of the *mu'azzin* was the song of my days and evenings in Cairo—just as it had been the theme song in the Old City of Jerusalem and was destined to remain in all my later wanderings through Muslim lands. It sounded the same everywhere in spite of the differences of dialect and intonation which might be evident in the people's daily speech: a unity of sound which made me realize in those days at Cairo how deep was the inner unity of all Muslims, and how

¹ In later years, these sorrows were to touch Asad himself: his father, sister and aunt all died in Nazi concentration camps— while he was held in an internment camp as "an involuntary 'guest' of the Government of India". Asad, "Author's Note", *Essays*, 1. See also Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam", *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, September 1981, p. 61.

² *Mecca*, 93-96.

artificial and insignificant were the dividing lines between them. They were one in their way of thinking and judging between right and wrong, and one in their perception of what constitutes the good life.

It seemed to me that for the first time I had come across a community in which kinship between man and man was not due to accidents of common racial or economic interests but to something far deeper and far more stable: a kinship of common outlook which lifted all barriers of loneliness between man and man.¹

* * *

Spiritual Serenity in Damascus

It was with excitement of a new understanding, with my eyes opened to things I had not suspected before, that I wandered in those summer days [of 1923] through the alleys of the old bazaar of Damascus and recognized the spiritual restfulness in the life of its people. Their inner security could be observed² in the way they behaved toward one another: in the warm dignity with which they met or parted; in the manner in which two men would walk together, holding each other by the hand like children—simply because they felt friendly toward each other; in the manner in which the shopkeepers dealt with one another. Those traders in the little shops, those inexorable callers to passersby seemed to have no grasping fear and no envy in them: so much so that the owner of a shop would leave it in the custody of his neighbour and competitor whenever it became necessary for him to be away for a while. I often saw a potential customer stop before an untended stall, obviously debating within himself whether to wait for the return of the vendor or to move on to the adjoining stall—and invariably the neighbouring trader, the competitor, would step in to enquire after the customer's wants and sell him the required goods—not his own goods, but those of his absent neighbour—and would leave the purchase price on the neighbour's bench. Where in Europe could one have witnessed a like transaction?²

* * *

The Umayyad Mosque

One Friday I went with my friend and host into the Umayyad

¹ *Mecca*, 108-109.

² *Mecca*, 125-126.

Mosque [in Damascus]. The many marble columns which supported the domed ceiling shone under the sun rays that fell through the lintel windows. There was a scent of musk in the air, red and blue carpets covered the floor. In long, even rows stood many hundreds of men behind the *imam* who led the prayer; they bowed, knelt, touched the ground with their foreheads, and rose again: all in disciplined unison, like soldiers. It was very quiet; while the congregation was standing, one could hear the voice of the old *imam* from the distant depths of the huge hall, reciting verses from the Qur'an; and when he bowed or prostrated himself, the entire congregation followed him as one man, bowing and prostrating themselves before God as if He were present before their eyes... It was at this moment that I became aware how near their God and their faith were to these people. Their prayer did not seem to be divorced from their working day; it was part of it—not meant to help them forget life, but to remember it better by remembering God.

'How strange and wonderful', I said to my friend as we were leaving the mosque, 'that you people feel God to be so close to you. I wish I could feel so myself'.

'How else could it be, O my brother? Is not God, as our Holy Book says, *nearer to thee than the vein in thy neck*'?¹

* * *

Islam: A Way of Life

Islam did not seem to be so much a religion in the popular sense of the word as, rather, a way of life; not so much a system of theology as a programme of personal and social behaviour based on the consciousness of God. Nowhere in the Qur'an could I find reference to a need for 'salvation'. No original, inherited sin stood between the individual and his destiny—for, *nothing shall be attributed to man but what he himself has striven for*. No asceticism was required to open a hidden gate to purity: for purity was man's birthright, and sin meant no more than a lapse from the innate, positive qualities with which God was said to have endowed every human being. There was no trace of any dualism in the consideration of man's nature: body and soul seemed to be taken as one integral whole.²

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¹ *Mecca*, 127.

² *Mecca*, 128.

Relations with God and Man

At first I was somewhat startled by the Qur'an's concern not only with matters spiritual but also with many seemingly trivial, mundane aspects of life; but in time I began to understand that if man were indeed an integral unity of body and soul—as Islam insisted he was—no aspect of his life could be too 'trivial' to come within the purview of religion. With all this, the Qur'an never let its followers forget that the life of this world was only one stage of man's way to a higher existence, and that his ultimate goal was of a spiritual nature. Material prosperity, it said, is desirable but not an end in itself: and therefore man's appetites, though justified in themselves, must be restrained and controlled by moral consciousness. This consciousness ought to relate not merely to man's relation with God but also to his relations with men; not only to the spiritual perfection of the individual but also to the creation of such social conditions as might be conducive to the spiritual development of all, so that all might live in fullness...¹

* * *

Preparation for Something to Come

The days pass, and the nights are short and we ride southward at dusk at a brisk pace. Our dromedaries are in excellent shape—they have recently been watered, and the last two days have provided them with abundant pasture. There are still fourteen days between here and Mecca, and even more if, as is probable, we spend some time in the towns of Hail and Medina, both of which lie on our route.

An unusual impatience has taken hold of me: an urgency for which I know no explanation. Hitherto I have been wont to enjoy travelling at leisure, with no particular urge to reach my destination quickly; the days and weeks spent in journey had each of them a fulfilment of its own, and the goal always seemed to be incidental. But now I have begun to feel what I have never felt before in my years in Arabia: an impatience to reach the end of the road. What end? To see Mecca? I have been to the Holy City so often, and know its life so thoroughly, that it no longer holds out any promise of new discoveries.

¹ Loc. cit.

Or is it perhaps a new kind of discovery that I am anticipating? It must be so—for I am being drawn to Mecca by a strange, personal expectancy, as if this spiritual centre of the Muslim world, with its multinational congregation of people from all corners of the earth, were a kind of promise, a gateway to a wider world than the one in which I am now living. Not that I have grown tired of Arabia; no, I love its deserts, its towns, the ways of its people as I have always loved them: that first hint of Arabian life in the Sinai Desert some ten years ago has never been disappointed, and the succeeding years have only confirmed my original expectation: but...the conviction has grown within me that Arabia has given me all that it had to give.

I am strong, young, healthy. I can ride for many hours at a stretch without being unduly tired. I can travel—and have been doing so for years—like a beduin, without a tent and without any of the small comforts which the townspeople of Najd often regard as indispensable on long desert journeys. I am at home in all the little crafts of beduin life, and have adopted, almost imperceptibly, the manners and habits of a Najdi Arab. But is this all there is to be? Have I lived so long in Arabia only to become an Arab?—or was it perhaps a preparation for something yet to come?¹

* * *

A Desert and Prophecy

There are many more beautiful landscapes in the world [than those of the Arabian desert], but none, I think that can shape man's spirit in so sovereign a way. In its hardness, and sparseness, the desert strips our desire to comprehend life of all subterfuges, of all the manifold delusions with which a more bountiful nature may entrap man's mind and cause him to project his own imageries into the world around him. The desert is bare and clean and knows no compromise. It sweeps out of the heart of man all the lovely fantasies that could be used as a masquerade for wishful thinking, and thus makes him free to surrender himself to an Absolute that has no image: the farthest of all that is far and yet the nearest of all that is near.

Ever since man began to think, the desert has been the cradle, of all his beliefs in One God. True, even in softer environments and more favourable climes have men had, time and again, an inkling of His

¹ *Mecca*, 135-136.

existence and oneness, as, for instance, in the ancient Greek concept of *Moirā*, the indefinable Power behind and above the Olympian gods: but such concepts were never more than the outcome of a vague feeling, a divining rather than certain knowledge--until the knowledge broke forth with dazzling certainty to men of the desert and from out of the desert. It was from a burning thornbush in the desert of Midian that the voice of God rang out to Moses; it was in the wilderness of the Judean desert that Jesus received the message of the Kingdom of God; and it was in the cave of Hira, in the desert hills near Mecca, that the first call came to Muhammad of Arabia.¹

* * *

'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ūd's Humility

...even after [the founder of modern Saudi Arabia King 'Abd al-'Aziz] Ibn Saud had acquired a kingdom of his own by his own effort and was undisputed ruler of the land, he behaved toward his father with such humility that he would never even consent to set foot in a room of the castle if Abd ar-Rahman was in the room below--'for', he would say, 'how can I allow myself to walk over my father's head'? He would never sit down in the old man's presence without being expressly invited to do so. I still remember the discomfiture this kingly humility caused me one day at Riyadh (I think it was in December, 1927). I was paying one of my customary visits to the King's father in his apartments in the royal castle; we were sitting on the ground on cushions, the old gentleman expatiating on one of his favourite religious themes. Suddenly an attendant entered the room and announced, 'The *Skuyukh* [i.e. the King] is coming'. In the next moment Ibn Saud stood in the doorway. Naturally, I wanted to rise, but old Abd ar-Rahman gripped me by the wrist and pulled me down, as if to say, 'Thou art *my* guest'. I was embarrassed beyond words at thus having to remain seated while the King, after greeting his father from afar, was left standing in the doorway, obviously awaiting permission to enter the room, but he must have been accustomed to similar whimsies on his father's part, for he winked at me with a half-smile to put me at ease. Meanwhile, old Abd ar-Rahman went on with his discourse, as if no interruption had occurred. After a few minutes he looked up, nodded to his son and said: 'Step closer, O my boy, and sit down'. The King was at that time forty-

¹ *Mecca*, 144-145.

seven or forty-eight years old.

Some months later—we were at Mecca at the time—news was brought to the King that his father had died in Riyadh. I shall never forget the uncomprehending stare with which he looked for several seconds at the messenger, and the despair which slowly and visibly engulfed the features that were normally so serene and composed; and how he jumped with a terrible roar, 'My father is dead!' and, with great strides, ran out of the room, his *abaya* trailing on the ground behind him; and how he bounded up the stairway, past the awe-struck faces of his men-at-arms, not knowing himself where he was going or why, shouting, shouting, 'My father is dead!' 'My father is dead!' For two days afterward he refused to see anyone, took neither food nor drink and spent day and night in prayer. How many sons of middle age, how many kings who had won themselves a kingdom through their own strength, would have thus mourned the passing of a father who had died the peaceful death of old age?¹

* * *

'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ūd and Julius Caesar

A good and just man in his personal affairs, loyal to his friends and supporters, generous towards his enemies and implacable towards hypocrites, graced by intellectual gifts far above the level of most of his followers, Ibn Saud has established a condition of public security in his vast domains unequalled in Arab lands since the time of the early Caliphate a thousand years ago. His personal authority is tremendous, but it does not rest so much on actual power as on the suggestive strength of his character. He is utterly unassuming in words and demeanour. His truly democratic spirit enables him to converse with the beduins who come to him in dirty, tattered garments as if he were one of them, and to allow them to call him by his first name, Abd al-Aziz.

Sometimes, when he is entirely relaxed, a gentle smile plays about Ibn Saud's mouth and gives an almost spiritual quality to the beauty of his face...; he shows his musical bent only in his little poems, his colourful descriptions of experiences, and his songs of war and love which have spread through the whole of Najd and are sung by men as they ride on their dromedaries across the desert and women in the

¹ Mecca, 164-165.

seclusion of their chambers. And it reveals itself in the way his daily life follows a regular, elastic rhythm suited to the demands of his royal office. Like Julius Caesar, he possesses to a high degree the capacity to pursue several trains of thought at one and the same time, without in the least curtailing the intensity with which he attacks each individual problem.

The acuteness of his perceptions is often uncanny. He has an almost unerring, instinctive insight into the motives of the people with whom he has to deal. Not infrequently—as I myself have had the opportunity to witness—he is able to read men's thoughts before they are spoken, and seems to sense a man's attitude towards him at the very moment of that man's entering the room.¹

* * *

Arabs Best Community to carry Islam's Universal Message

In no other community [than the Arab one] could the tenets of Islam have so readily coincided with what the people who were first addressed by the Qur'an had always instinctively felt and regarded as true... To phrase it yet differently, one might say that God's final message to man was revealed through the medium—and in the language—of the one people that was able to grasp its innermost purport all at once and to translate its ideological dynamism into reality by virtue of its own, unique psychological make-up: and this explains why Islam, carried forward by the Arabs, spread so irresistibly, within a few decades, to the shores of the Atlantic and the borders of China.²

* * *

Islam's Appeal: A Dialogue

'Tell me, O Muhammad', asks Mansur, 'how did it happen thou hast come to live among the Arabs? And how didst thou come to embrace Islam?'

'I will tell thee how it happened', interposes Zayd.³ 'First he fell

¹ *Mecca*, 177-178.

² *Mecca*, 181.

³ Zayd ibn Ghanim, a Bedouin, was Asad's guide during most of his travels across the Arabian desert and saved his life when Asad lost his way in one of his uncharted journeys; Mansur al-'Assāf, too, was his traveling companion but for a shorter period.

in love with the Arabs, and then with their faith. Isn't it true, O my uncle'?

'What Zayd says is true, O Mansur. Many years ago, when I first came to Arab lands, I was attracted by the way you people lived. And when I began to ask myself what you thought and what you believed in, I came to know about Islam'.

'And didst thou, O Muhammad, find all at once that Islam was the True Word of God'?

'Well, no, this did not come about so quickly. For one thing, I did not then believe that God had ever spoken directly to man, or that the books which men claimed to be His word were anything but the works of wise men...'

Mansur stares at me with utter incredulity: 'How could that be, O Muhammad? Didst thou not even believe in the Scriptures which Moses brought, or the Gospel of Jesus? But I have always thought that the peoples of the West believe at least in them'?

'Some do, O Mansur, and others do not. I was one of those others...'

And I explain to him that many people in the West have long ceased to regard the Scriptures—their own as well as those of others—as true Revelations of God, but see in them rather the history of man's religious aspirations as they have evolved over the ages.

'But this view of mine was shaken as soon as I came to know something of Islam', I add. 'I came to know about it when I found that the Muslims lived in a way quite different from what the Europeans thought should be man's way; and every time I learned something more about the teachings of Islam, I seemed to discover something that I had always known without knowing it...' And so I go on, telling Mansur of my first journey to the Near East—of how in the Desert of Sinai I had my first impression of the Arabs; of what I saw and felt in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan and Syria; of how in Damascus I had my first premonition that a new, hitherto unsuspected way to truth was slowly unfolding before me; and how, after visiting Turkey, I returned to Europe and found it difficult to live again in the Western world: for, on the one hand, I was eager to gain a deeper understanding of the strange uneasiness which my first acquaintance with the Arabs and their culture had produced in me, hoping that it would help me better understand what I myself expected of life; and, on the other hand, I had reached the point where it was becoming clear to me that never again would I be

able to identify myself with the aims of Western society.¹

* * *

Islam behind Muslims' Achievements

My own observation had by now convinced me that the mind of the average Westerner held an utterly distorted image of Islam. What I saw in the pages of the Qur'an was not a 'crudely materialistic' world-view but, on the contrary, an intense God-consciousness that expressed itself in a rational acceptance of all God-created nature: a harmonious side-by-side of intellect and sensual urge, spiritual need and social demand. It was obvious to me that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own failure to live up to it.

For, indeed, it was Islam that had carried the early Muslims to tremendous heights by directing all their energies toward conscious thought as the only means to understanding the nature of God's creation and, thus, of His will. No demand had been made of them to believe in dogmas difficult or even impossible on intellectual comprehension...and thus, the thirst after knowledge which distinguished early Muslim history had not been forced, as elsewhere in the world, to assert itself in a painful struggle against the traditional faith. On the contrary, it had stemmed exclusively from that faith. The Arabian Prophet had declared that *Striving after knowledge is a most sacred duty for every Muslim man and woman*: and his followers were led to understand that only by acquiring knowledge could they fully worship the Lord. When they pondered the Prophet's saying, *God creates no disease without creating a cure for it as well*, they realized that by searching for unknown cures they would contribute to a fulfilment of God's will on earth: and so medical research became invested with the holiness of a religious duty. They read the Qur'an verse, *We create every living thing out of water*—and in their endeavour to penetrate to the meaning of these words, they began to study living organisms and the laws of their development: and thus they established the science of biology. The Qur'an pointed to the harmony of the stars and their movements as witnesses of their Creator's glory: and thereupon the sciences of

¹ Mecca, 184-185.

astronomy and mathematics were taken up by the Muslims with a fervour which in other religions was reserved for prayer alone. The Copernican system, which established the earth's rotation around its axis and the revolution of the planets around the sun, was evolved in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century (only to be met by the fury of the ecclesiastics...): but the foundations of this system had actually been laid six hundred years earlier, in Muslim countries—for already in the ninth and tenth centuries Muslim astronomers had reached the conclusion that the earth was globular and that it rotated around its axis, and had made accurate calculations of latitudes and longitudes, and many of them maintained—without ever being accused of heresy—that the earth rotated around the sun. And in the same way they took to chemistry and physics and physiology, and to all the other sciences in which the Muslim genius was to find its most lasting monument. In building that monument they did no more than follow the admonition of their Prophet that *If anybody proceeds on his way in search of knowledge, God will make easy for him the way to Paradise; that The superiority of the learned over the mere pious is like the superiority of the moon when it is full over all other stars; and that The ink of the scholars is more precious than the blood of martyrs.*

Throughout the whole creative period of Muslim history—that is to say, during the first five centuries after the Prophet's time—science and learning had no greater champion than Muslim civilization and no home more secure than the lands in which Islam was supreme.¹

* * *

No Priesthood in Islam

There are few things, if any, which bring men so close to one another, as praying together. This, I believe, is true of every religion, but particularly of Islam, which rests on the belief that no intermediary is necessary, or indeed possible, between man and God. The absence of all priesthood, clergy, and even of an organized 'church' makes every Muslim feel that he is truly sharing in and not merely attending, a common act of worship when he prays in congregation. Since there are no sacraments in Islam, every adult and sane Muslim may perform any religious function whatsoever, whether it be leading a congregation in prayer, performing a marriage ceremony or conducting a burial service. None need be 'ordained' for the service of God: the religious teachers

¹ *Mecca*, 190-192.

and leaders of the Muslim community are simple men who enjoy a reputation (sometimes deserved and sometimes not) for erudition in theology and religious law.¹

* * *

The Centre of the Universe

This... was the Kaaba, the goal of longing for so many millions of people for so many centuries. To reach this goal, countless pilgrims had made heavy sacrifices throughout the ages; many had died on the way; many had reached it only after great privations; and to all of them this small, square building was the apex of their desires, and to reach it meant fulfilment.

There it stood, almost a perfect cube (as its Arabic name connotes) entirely covered with black brocade, a quiet island in the middle of the vast quadrangle of the mosque: much quieter than any other work of architecture anywhere in the world. It would almost appear that he who first built the Kaaba—for since the time of Abraham the original structure has been rebuilt several times in the same shape—wanted to create a parable of man's humility before God. The builder knew that no beauty of architectural rhythm and no perfection of line, however great, could ever do justice to the idea of God: and so he confined himself to the simplest three-dimensional form imaginable—a cube of stone.

I had seen in various Muslim countries mosques in which the hands of great artists had created inspired works of art. I had seen mosques in North Africa, shimmering prayer-palaces, of marble and white alabaster; the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a powerfully perfect cupola over a delicate understructure, a dream of lightness and heaviness united without contradiction; and the majestic buildings of Istanbul, the Sulaymaniyya, the Yeni-Valide, the Bayazid Mosque; and those of Brussa, in Asia Minor; and the Safavid mosques in Iran—royal harmonies of stone, multicoloured majolica tiles, mosaics, huge stalactite portals over silver-embossed doors, slender minarets with alabaster and turquoise-blue galleries, marble-covered quadrangles with fountains and age-old plantain trees; and the mighty ruins of Tamerlane's mosques in Samarkand, splendid even in their decay.

All these I had seen—but never had I felt so strongly as now,

¹ *Mecca*, 215.

before the Kaaba, that the hand of the builder had come so close to his religious conception. In the utter simplicity of a cube, in the complete renunciation of all beauty of line and form, spoke this thought: 'Whatever beauty man may be able to create with his hands, it will be only conceit to deem it worthy of God; therefore, the simplest that man can conceive is the greatest that he can do to express the glory of God.' A similar feeling may have been responsible for the mathematical simplicity of the Egyptian pyramids—although there man's conceit had at least found a vent in the tremendous dimensions he gave to his buildings. But here, in the Kaaba, even the size spoke of human renunciation and self-surrender; and the proud modesty of this little structure had no compare on earth.

There is only one entrance into the Kaaba—a silver-sheathed door on the northeast side, about seven feet above ground level, so that it can only be reached by means of a movable staircase which is placed before the door on a few days of the year. The interior, usually closed (I saw it only on later occasions), is very simple: a marble floor with a few carpets and lamps of bronze and silver hanging from a roof that is supported by heavy wooden beams. Actually, this interior has no special significance of its own, for the sanctity of the Kaaba applies to the whole building, which is the *qibla*—that is, the direction of prayer—for the entire Islamic world. It is toward this symbol of God's Oneness that hundreds of millions of Muslims the world over turn their faces in prayer five times a day.

Embedded in the eastern corner of the building and left uncovered is a dark-coloured stone surrounded by a broad silver frame. This Black Stone, which has been kissed hollow by many generations of pilgrims, has been the cause of much misunderstanding among non-Muslims, who believe it to be a fetish taken over by Muhammad as a concession to the pagan Meccans. Nothing could be farther from truth. Just as the Kaaba is an object of reverence but not of worship, so too is the Black Stone. It is revered as the only remnant of Abraham's original building; and because the lips of Muhammad touched it on his Farewell Pilgrimage, all pilgrims have done the same ever since. The Prophet was well aware that all the later generations of the Faithful would always follow his example; and when he kissed the stone he knew that on it the lips of future pilgrims would forever meet the memory of his lips in the symbolic embrace he thus offered, beyond time and beyond death, to his entire community. And the pilgrims, when they kiss the Black Stone, feel that they are embracing the Prophet and all the other Muslims who

have been here before them and those who will come after them.

No Muslim would deny that the Kaaba had existed long before the Prophet Muhammad; indeed, its significance lies precisely in this fact. The Prophet did not claim to be the founder of a new religion. On the contrary; self-surrender to God—*Islam*—has been, according to the Qur'an, 'man's natural inclination' since the dawn of human consciousness: it was this that Abraham and Moses and Jesus and all other Prophets of God had been teaching—the message of the Qur'an being but the last of the Divine Revelations. Nor would a Muslim deny that the sanctuary had been full of idols and fetishes before Muhammad broke them, just as Moses had broken the golden calf at Sinai: for, long before the idols were brought into the Kaaba, the True God had been worshipped there, and thus Muhammad did no more than restore Abraham's temple to its original purpose.

And there I stood before the temple of Abraham and gazed at the marvel without thinking (for thoughts and reflections came only much later), and out of some hidden, smiling kernel within me there slowly grew an elation like a song.

Smooth marble slabs, with sunlight reflections dancing upon them, covered the ground in a wide circle around the Kaaba, and over these marble slabs walked many people, men and women, round and round the black-draped House of God. Among them were some who wept, some who loudly called to God in prayer, and many who had no words and no tears but could only walk with lowered heads...

It is part of the *hajj* to walk seven times around the Kaaba: not just to show respect to the central sanctuary of Islam but to recall to oneself the basic demand of Islamic life. The Kaaba is a symbol of God's Oneness; and the pilgrim's bodily movement around it is a symbolic expression of human activity, implying that not only our thoughts and feelings—all that is comprised in the term 'inner life'—but also our outward, active life, our doings and practical endeavours must have God as their centre.

And I, too, moved slowly forward and became part of the circular flow around the Kaaba. Off and on I became conscious of a man or woman near me; isolated pictures appeared fleetingly before my eyes and vanished. There was a huge Negro in white *ihram*, with a wooden rosary slung like a chain around a powerful, black wrist. An old Malay tripped along by my side for a while, his arms dangling, as if in helpless confusion, against his batik sarong. A grey eye under bushy brows—to whom did it belong?—and now lost in the crowd. Among

the many people in front of the Black Stone, a young Indian woman: she was obviously ill; in her narrow, delicate face lay a strangely open yearning visible to the onlooker's eye like the life of fishes and algae in the depth of a crystal-clear pond. Her hands with their pale, upturned palms were stretched out toward the Kaaba, and her fingers trembled as if in accompaniment to a wordless prayer...

I walked on and on, the minutes passed, all that had been small and bitter in my heart began to leave my heart, I became part of a circular stream—oh, was this the meaning of what we were doing: to become aware that one is a part of a movement in an orbit? Was this, perhaps, all confusion's end? And the minutes dissolved, and time stood still, and this was the centre of the universe...¹

(in: *Islamic Studies*, 39/2 (2001), pp. 155-231).

¹ *Mecca*, 367-370.

Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal, Kt.

M.S. No. 9, 4529

Residence at Lahore

Lahore

Date 1934

Handwritten notes in Urdu at the top right, including the name 'Leopold Weiss' and other illegible text.

(27)

درد

درماندگی

Main handwritten text in Urdu, starting with 'بے زبانی کہ باغ سادہ خط کے کسے اور بس سبز زلفیہ اور اللہ کے ہوا کے...' and ending with 'برگ کا لگانا نہیں ہوا'.

Large block of handwritten text in Urdu on the right side of the page, written vertically.

Iqbal's letter to Nazir Niazi (27 June 1934), refers also Asad's Jewish name, Leopold Weiss

MURAD WILFRIED HOFMANN

MUHAMMAD ASAD: EUROPE'S GIFT TO ISLAM

Introduction

On 18 May, 2000, the Austrian Oriental Society Hammer-Purgstall in its premises in Vienna organized a symposium called "Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) — a Life Dedicated to Islam". It was attended by a variety of people including an 89-year old cousin from Asad's family in Vienna. Günther Windhager, an Austrian graduate student writing his doctoral thesis on Asad gave a biographical introduction illustrated by rare photographs obtained from Asad's stepson Heinrich Ahmad Schiemann, now 82 years old. Professor Reinhard Schulze (Berne University) devoted his study to Asad's approach to Islam, and Dr. Murad Hofmann, whose *Diary of a German Muslim* (1983) carries an introduction by Asad, spoke about "The Reception of Muhammad Asad's Thought in the Muslim World".

Against this background I propose to throw some light on the two extreme ends of the remarkable Asad phenomenon: (i) His debut as a prodigal, self-made Orientalist writer before his conversion to Islam; and (ii) the reactions to his views by Muslims in the West as well as in the Muslim world, before and after his death in Spain.

I

German readers are fortunate to have access to Muhammad Asad's earliest book published under his original name: Leopold Weiss, *Unromantisches Morgenland¹ — Aus dem Tagebuch einer Reise* — Frankfurt: Societats-Druckerei G.m.b.H. 1924.

It was written at the end of 1922 for the publishers *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which was then and continues to be even now the most

¹ "Unromantic Orient".

prestigious German journal. Weiss wrote this book at the tender age of 22. Together with the painteress Elsa Schieman, who would be his first wife, between March and October of that year he had visited Palestine, Transjordan ('Ammān, with only 6000 inhabitants), Syria, Egypt (Cairo and Alexandria), Turkey (Smyrna, just burnt down, and Constantinople) as well as Malta. The book is illustrated by 59 black-and-white photographs which are now of great historical importance. The sources of the photographs are not mentioned.

This small diary of just 159 pages amazes one in several ways. Most surprising, however, is the young author's talent as a writer, in particular his powerfully evocative, yet lyrical descriptions of countryside, moods, and people; they are often startling but never banal. The colour of light, for instance, may be "shell-like"; travellers may be "silent, as if wrapped up in the great landscape". Forms and movements can be of an "intoxicating uniqueness and "wind like a breath without substance". In Jerusalem, he found "little air to breathe" and "a yearning for terror". Here, like nowhere else, Weiss "heard history roar by" and walked on ground so soft that his "feet took comfort from walking".

We ought to remember that the German literary genius, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), at that time was at the peak of his fame as a trend-setter. Many a German soldier in the First World War had gone to battle with Rilke poems in his pocket. Young Leopold Weiss would naturally have been impressed by Rilke's penetrating, spiritualistic lyricism. The amazing thing is that young Weiss, born to be a master, showed neither indebtedness to Rilke nor Rilkian mannerism. His literary skills, so clear in his original English and German versions of *The Road to Mecca*, obviously were already mature in 1922.

A second surprise comes with the realization that Weiss, even then, was enamoured of, and most romantically infatuated with, almost everything Arab. He portrays himself as an uncritical, unconditional admirer of the Arab race and culture. For him, the "Arabs are blessed" (44) and archetypically graceful. In his view, it was "a wonderful expression of the widely alert Arab being" that it "does not know of any separation between yesterday and tomorrow, thought and action, objective reality and personal sentiment" (77). The Arabs, according to him, "always identify with the simple things happening out of nowhere (and are therefore free of tragedy and remorse)" (86). They lead "a wonderfully simple life that in a direct line leads from birth to death" (91).

After talking to leading figure of Transjordan Weiss, in his

idealization of the Arabs, indulged in prophetic lyrics: "You are timeless. You jumped out of the course of world history... You are the contemporary ones until you will be invested by Will, and then you will become bearers of the Future. Then your power will be dense and pure..." (93). (Here, I must admit, Rilke had looked over his shoulders.)

There is nostalgia in the air when Weiss admires the Arabs because "their lives flow with the naïveté of animals" (127). Even while in Istanbul, he regretfully sighs: "Oh, my Arab people"! (153). One more quote would suffice: "During several months, I was so impressed by the uniqueness of the Arabs that I am now looking everywhere for the strong centre of their lives... recognizing the eternally exciting, the stream of vitality, in such a great mass, in so strange a nation" (133). Against that astonishing affinity with all things Arab-- but surprisingly not Islamic! — the young Weiss, in the book's 'Introduction', muses: "In order to understand their genius one would have to enter their circle and live with their associations. Can one do that"?

Asad is one of those Westerners who, with extraordinary effort, tried to turn into a real Arab. Like all the others, he became a *virtual* Arab for the simple reason that neither a civilization (Islamic), nor a nation (Turkey), nor an individual (after about the age of about 16) can fully assimilate any other culture to the point of erasing the previous one. Cultural transmigration was, and is, a futile attempt. Yet Muhammad Asad, fuelled by his youthful infatuation, was perhaps closer than anybody else to becoming a "real" Arab.

We know from *The Road to Mecca* that the process which ultimately led Leopold Weiss to Islam was triggered by his political opposition to Zionism in Palestine. *Unromantisches Morgenland* seems to tell that story much more precisely. For him, Zionism had entered into an unholy alliance with Western powers and thereby became a wound in the body of the Near East. However Weiss, otherwise quite far-sighted, expected Zionism to fail because of the "sick immorality" of its Israel project (33). He considered the very idea that the plight of the Jewish people could be cured through a homeland, without first healing the malady of Judaism as such, as a sick one. The Jews, so thought Weiss, had not lost Palestine without reason. They had lost it for having betrayed their moral commitment and their God. Without reversing this disastrous course, it was useless to build roofs in Palestine. Weiss, still declaring himself to be a Jew (45), did not reject Judaism but political Zionism (56), and did so less on political than on *religious* grounds. This is the surprise no. 3.

There is another major insight to be gained from Asad's first book: his virulent cultural criticism of the Occident as spent, decadent, exploitative (capitalist) and mindlessly consumerist. Weiss does not indicate in any way that World War One had just taken place. But he betrays some of the cultural contempt typical of the pre-war intellectuals and of their longing for what is "natural", risky and existential when complaining "how terribly risky is the absence of risk". For him, the Europeans had become spiritually sluggish, "clinging to things", and losing their instincts as well as their "rope-dancing" vitality (5). Indeed, he contemptuously contrasts liberal utilitarianism against an Orient that is about to "regain from its own self what is grand and new" and "allows individuals the freedom to live a life without borders" (74). With regard to the young Soviet Union Weiss, like many others at the time, even dares to speak with a positive note and mentions the possibility of the "liberation of the entire world" (77).

Thus, *Unromantisches Morgenland* reveals Leopold Weiss as a poet, a lover (of Arabia), an anti-Zionist, and a moralist. What amazes one in all these respects is the authority with which he speaks as a political pundit, making bold forecasts. Being a gifted amateur, he successfully poses as an accomplished *expert* on Near Eastern affairs in general. Obviously still a beginner in Arabic in spite of his Hebrew background, Weiss mentions only on one single occasion where he used an interpreter, as a back-up (92). In so posturing, Weiss showed himself, so gifted that one would hesitate to accuse him of imposture. Did he, for instance, not grasp correctly in 1922 that "Arab *unity* will only come long after *Arab freedom* has been achieved in the individual countries; and not before" (124)? Chutzpah, or an extraordinary degree of intuition?

There is one last amazing thing that we find, or rather do not find, in Asad's earliest book: Islam is virtually absent. The only time when it is mentioned, Asad dismisses it as being non-essential for the Arab genius because that is "rooted in its blood" (91) — a statement somewhat smacking of racist Arabophilia. Thus, while holding many promises, the book did not foreshadow Asad's conversion to Islam.

The editors of *Frankfurter Zeitung* immediately recognized the promise of the greatness of the author. So it was only logical for them to order another travelogue from him. Weiss accepted the assignment, received the money, but was unable to deliver (and was fired). However, only two years after the appearance of *Unromantisches Morgenland*, in 1926

in Berlin,¹ he became a Muslim.

II

Against this illustrious background, let us now turn to the other end, and beyond, and consider Muhammad Asad's eventful life in order to assess the impact he has had on Islam in the 20th century and to find out how his promise, so great in 1922, would materialize.

In 1901, in Leipzig, Max Henning — possibly a pseudonym for August Müller, an Orientalist professor at Königsberg University — published his well-known and much appreciated translation of the Qur'an into German. It is to be noted, however, that in his 'Introduction' he observed that "Islam has obviously played out its political role". This was, of course, the accepted view among the politicians and orientalists in Europe, and that too for understandable reasons: The entire Muslim world, except for a tiny part in the interior of Arabia, had been subjected to colonization. Both de-Islamization and Christianization seemed to be making headway. The Islamic moorings of the Muslim élites who had been educated in the West had been weakened. In short, the Occident, more vigorous and dynamic and functionally more impressive in great many respects and embodying rationality and progress, was seen to be achieving its *mission civilisatrice* world-wide.

Today we know that Henning and his fellow observers had made a misjudgement so crass that it amuses us today. By hindsight the question is whether they could have foreseen the enormous success of the Islamic movements in revitalizing Islam throughout the world during the 20th century? This raises another question: What triggered these movements towards an Islamic awakening and rejuvenation? Could their effects have been foreseen then?

In my own view, Max Henning might have avoided his misjudgement if he had been aware of the Muslim intellectuals who were eventually instrumental in shaping Islam's contemporary upsurge: Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Rashid Ridā (d. 1935), Hasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), and Sayyid Abu 'l-A'la al-Maududi (d. 1979). Muhammad Asad too must be reckoned as belonging to this

¹ In 1927, Asad married Elsa in Cairo and formally confirmed his conversion to Islam there.

distinguished group of people and played a key role both as a thinker and as an activist who had an exceptional impact both horizontally and vertically.

Indeed, never since Karl May (1842-1912), the most popular author of adventure stories ever written in German, has anyone fascinated millions of German readers with things Arabic and Islamic as Muhammad Asad did with his *Der Weg nach Mekka*,¹ a book that became a best seller the very moment it appeared, first in English, as *The Road to Mecca* in 1954² and then in German in 1955. Perhaps no other book except the Qur'an itself led to a greater number of conversions to Islam.

We know today that the book is a mixture of fact and fiction, which was as legitimate for Asad as it had been for Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (d. 1832) when he called his autobiographic *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ("Truth and Fiction"). What comes out of the book with compelling force is the truth of the Islamic *experience* and the genuine description of the spiritual landscape of Islam.

In *The Road to Mecca* Asad still appears as a friend of all things Arab, but now Arab virtues and Arabic civilization are seen rooted in Islam. Even those passages which Asad took over from *Unromantisches Morgenland* and made it a part of his *The Road to Mecca* are not simply transposed; they have been presented as seen through an Islamic prism.

Nor can one hold it against Asad that his account of what prompted him to accept Islam (see chapter 9 "Dajjāl") remains less than convincing: a subway scene in Berlin, and the finding by "chance" of the Qur'anic verse to explain in the phenomenon he observed. Well, did St. Augustine (in his *Confessions*) or Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī (in his *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*) give an answer that would fully satisfy everybody? Can any convert fully and convincingly analyse his conversion?

III

At the same time, one might venture to say that Asad's impact was not only *horizontal*. He has left his mark *vertically* as well in scientific depth, with a series of books each one of which is a pioneering effort, if not a *chef d'oeuvre*.

Let us cast a glance at them.

(1) The first of these is *Islam at the Crossroads* (Lahore: Ashraf

¹ First German edition Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag 1955, revised ed. 1982. In the same year it reappeared in Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982.

² New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Max Reinhardt, 1954.

1934), showed Asad once more as a cultural critic with a political vision, as a sociologist of religion, and as a political thinker with analytical capabilities bordering on the prophetic. Its first chapter, "The Open Road to Islam", shows Asad as a theologian as well. The content of this chapter in particular seems to have been much appreciated. This is evident from the fact that it has been frequently published separately under the title: *The Spirit of Islam*.

In this book Asad foresaw in particular the current crisis of Christian christology — even clerics deserting the notion of divine incarnation — the emergence of Islam as a third force between Capitalism and Communism—both sharing a great deal of commonality — and World War Two as "a war of hitherto unknown dimensions and scientific terror [!]" which will "lead the materialist self-conceit of the Western civilization in such a gruesome way *ad absurdum* that its people will begin once more ... to search after spiritual truth" (81).

Is this not where we find ourselves now?

Small in format and limited to 160 pages, *Islam at the Crossroads* is in fact a monumental historical, intellectual, and sociological critique of Christianity and the Occident as a whole. It can be considered to be the first almost total rejection of Europe ("born out of the spirit of the crusades"; 68) and Western ideology. This was later followed up by writers such as Sayyid Qutb and the trend has now caught on in many quarters. In this respect one may consider Asad as a predecessor even of William Ophuls, *Requiem for Modern Politics* and Michel Houellebecq, *The World as Supermarket*.

Equally important is the fact that Asad, in an entirely orthodox manner, defends the *Sunnah* from the attacks which were made by Ignaz Goldziher towards the end of the nineteenth century and those that would be made by Joseph Schacht around the middle of the twentieth century onwards. At the same time, already in 1934, he envisages a revivification of Islamic jurisprudence (159) in order to overcome the "petrification of *fiqh*" and the "narrow-mindedness of the 'ulama class". More reasonable than the later attempts at "Islamization of knowledge", Asad urges to "study exact sciences on Western lines, but not concede to their philosophies" (92). The aim was not to reform Islam. "Islam as a spiritual and social institution cannot be improved" (154).

Even though Asad was realistic about the intensity of the Western prejudice against Islam, in this book he is on the whole remarkably optimistic about the future of his new religion. (Not much later this was to change somewhat in view of his interpretation of the

developments in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan).

(2) The second book of Asad was a translation, along with commentary, on parts of Imam al-Bukhāri's *Hadith* collection,¹ named *Sahih al-Bukhāri* into English under the title *The Early Years of Islam*, first published in Lahore in 1938.² In this work we meet, for the first time, Asad as a traditional Muslim *'ālim*, entering a field normally reserved for the traditionally trained *'ulamā'*.

The book contains the historical passages normally found in Vol. I, Book 1 ("How Revelation Began"), and Vol. V, Book 57 ("The Merits of the Prophet's Companions") and Book 59 (*al-Maghāzi*: Military Campaigns). However, Asad committed the last 29 sections of Book 57 to a new book called "How Islam Began."

This was a part of his attempt to re-order al-Bukhāri's material according either to subject matter (i.e. personalities) or chronology or both, an approach that ran him into some objections. After all, al-Bukhāri's *Sahih*, had been read and re-read and even committed to memory by so many Muslims since its collection in the third century A.H. the ninth century C.E. If — as I believe — Asad's re-arrangement was not intended to *replace* the traditional ordering of the *Sahih*, it was a legitimate and interesting attempt to allow a historical and thus coherent reading of this material. Nevertheless, one can understand the uneasiness on the part of those who have been accustomed to a certain arrangement over the course of centuries.

Equally important were Asad's detailed and extensive notes — an ideal way to make the *ahādith* come alive. It is the very thoroughness and lucidity of this commentary which one later finds again in Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an*. Typical, for instance, is Asad's treatment of conflicting reports on 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb's conversion to Islam (168). He reconciles these reports by suggesting that 'Umar's conversion "was probably not the result of one single experience".

With his extensive notes on parts of the *Sunnah*, Asad followed up his view — first expressed in *Islam at the Crossroads* — that not *Fiqh* but the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* must be refocused as the centre-pieces of Islam. With his work on the *Sahih*, by giving the entire corpus of *Hadith* a fresh credibility and respectability, Asad counted the dangerous trend to turn Islam into merely some form of a vague and amorphous Deism. It was a major effort indeed. Ever since, indiscriminate assaults on the

¹ The standard Arabic-English version is the translation in nine volumes by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1976.

² Arafat Publications; later reprinted in Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1981.

Sunnah, as mounted earlier by Goldziher and later by Schacht, look somewhat inept.

World War Two, however, prevented the publication of further parts of this work. With the German occupation of Austria in 1938 Asad had automatically become a German citizen. His resulting internment by the British in India (1939-1945) made further work on the project impossible, and during the partition of India in 1947, Asad lost all the material that he had prepared with the industry and dexterity for which he is well known.

(3) Asad's *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (1961),¹ again a small book of 107 pages only, has become an essential foundation for most further efforts to rejuvenate Islamic jurisprudence and to develop a much needed Islamic theory of state. Originally, research on this book was prompted by the need to develop an Islamic constitution for the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan: to base a society not on race or nationality but solely on the "ideology" of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. The book therefore reflects some of the intoxicating awareness that the Muslim world might have, now again, "a free choice of destiny".

Asad was aware that Islamic history could not provide models that could be copied directly. The Confederation of Madinah was set up under very peculiar circumstances; it was also unique in so far as it was being ruled over by a Messenger of God. Islamic history has ever since been characterized pretty much by despotism. The ideas of Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) and al-Māwardi (d. 450/1058) could not serve as the blue-prints of an Islamic community in the industrial age.

Asad therefore keenly felt the need to make a clear distinction between the relatively small set of divine norms governing State and government, found in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* which alone deserve the name of the *shari'ah*. As for *fiqh*, i.e. the enormous body of rules derived from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, it was essentially man-made notwithstanding the fact that its ultimate sources were rooted in Revelation.

At the same time, this distinction was considered revolutionary though today it has become pretty commonplace. Thanks to it, Asad was able to construct an Islamic theory of State not from a scratch, but free from the burden of Muslim history which is occasionally

¹ University of California Press 1961; reprinted in Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus 1980.

characterized by abuse of power, disrespect for law, arbitrary and unjustified taxation, lack of adequate administrative control, and considerable negligence in the institutionalisation of *shūra*. In contrast, Asad concluded that a "government subject to the people's consent is a most essential prerequisite of an Islamic state", that "the leadership of the state must be of an elective nature" (36), and that "the legislative powers of the state must be vested in an assembly chosen by the community for that purpose" (45). On the whole, Asad arrived at the conclusion that "a presidential system of government, somewhat akin to that practiced in the United States, would correspond more closely to the requirement of an Islamic polity" (61).

We still run into fellow Muslims who continue to claim that democracy is essentially incompatible with Islam. It is then that we realize how ground-breaking Asad was in this field some 40 years ago. But we also run into '*ulamā*' like Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradāwi and Fathi Osman who maintain that such people neither know enough of Islam nor of democracy, indicating that Asad's views are shared by a number of influential Islamic scholars.

(4) *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (1987)¹ seems to be the latest book of Asad. In fact, however, it consists in part of some of his oldest writings. It is a collection of some of the essays that were first published in 1946 and 1947 in his "one-man journal", *Arafat — A Monthly Critique of Muslim Thought* — which appeared for just a few years from Lahore. In the meantime, Asad had discovered his intellectual affinity to Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova who, like himself, had battled against sanctified conventions and defended the eternal law of Islam against all that goes beyond Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.

Asad's struggle to delineate the boundaries between *shari'ah* and *fiqh* appears in an intensified form in this book. Asad drives home the point that the "real" *shari'ah* must be identified (and possibly codified). Backed up by Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Ḥazm, he takes the uncompromising stand that "nothing merely based on *ijmā'* or *qiyās* — qualifies to be reckoned as a divine norm. On the basis of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* — and the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* alone — a new *ijtihād* was needed in order to develop a modern *fiqh*, responsive to contemporary issues. This *modern fiqh* should be much simpler than the highly complex traditional one. Asad hastened to add that, of course, no results of the new *ijtihād* could be admitted as forming part of the

¹ Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, pp. 195.

shari'ah either; otherwise modern *fuqahā'* would repeat the mistake of their ancestors: to petrify their jurisprudence.

This Law of Ours is of particular interest to Pakistani Muslims, especially its chapter "What do we mean by Pakistan"? of which a subsection is entitled "Evasion and Self-Deception". It includes seven moving radio addresses given by Asad to his Pakistani fellow citizens. He looked beyond official declarations of Islamism when he stated: "Neither the mere fact of having a Muslim majority, nor the mere holding of governmental key positions by Muslims, nor even the functioning of the personal laws of the *shari'ah* can justify us in describing any Muslim state as an 'Islamic State' " (109). He made it clear that neither the introduction of *zakāt*, nor outlawing *ribā*, nor prescribing *hijāb* or administering *hudūd* punishments *in and by themselves* will do the trick of turning a country into an Islamic one. For that, so Asad felt, there is only one way: to bring about "a community that *really* lives according to the tenets of Islam" and presently "there is not a single community of this kind in sight"(14).

It is in observations such as these that we encounter for the first time Muhammad Asad the Muslim idealist who had begun to express bitter feelings about the ground realities of the world of Islam.

(5) After working on it for decades, Asad's *oeuvre* reached its peak with his translation into Shakespearean English and commentary of the Qur'an, which appeared in 1980 under the title *The Message of the Qur'an*.¹ It was the best, next only to Abdullah Yusuf Ali's and Marmaduke Pickthall's translations which are the most remarkable among the contemporary efforts to convey the message of the Qur'an in English.² Asad's is perhaps the only translation which has been further translated *en toto* into several languages such as Turkish and Swedish. His work is particularly appreciated for the lucidity and precision of its commentary, based on his stupendous command of bedouin Arabic. Readers appreciate perhaps most that Asad treats them as grown-ups. He exposes the root of the translation problem, relates other options (and the reasons given for choosing them), and then explains which reason(s) he preferred in his particular translation.

On two grounds, the style of Asad's translation is debatable: On

¹ Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980, 999 pp. (large format).

² They include Muhammad 'Ali, Sher 'Ali, A. and A. Bewley, T. B. Irving, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali/Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Rashid Kassab, M. M. Khatib, and the Saudi version printed in Madinah, based on Yusuf Ali, to name a few.

the one hand it does not reflect the terse, compact, even laconic style of the Qur'an which Marmaduke Pickthall caught so much better in his translation of 1930. The difference between the two results from Asad's attempt to come as close as possible to nuances of meaning. Wherever, as in most cases, fully equivalent nouns and verbs are not available in both languages, Asad resorts to the use of qualifying adjectives and adverbs, absent in the Qur'anic text, or even to the duplication of noun-renderings, for instance, *shir'ah* in 5: 48 as "law and way of life". As a result, Asad's translation of a few Arabic words sometimes covers two whole lines.

The *basmalah* is a good case in point. Pickthall translates it as: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful"; Asad as: "In the name of God, the *Most Gracious*, the *Dispenser of Grace*" (Emphasis added). Not only is the choice of "Dispenser" unfortunate, the very idea of putting *al-Rahmān* (or, in other places, *al-Hakim*, *al-'Aziz*, *al-Qādir*, etc.) into superlative form smacks of Christian vocabulary and violates the simplicity of the Qur'anic language. Abdullah Yusuf Ali commits the same mistake.

Many translators of the Qur'an can be faulted today for the use of a high classical language which sounds both dated, let alone the fact that it is biblical. Shakespeare simply is not contemporary. I am not pleading for an "American" version (à la Irving) or a pedestrian, "cool", colloquial style. The language of the Qur'an also in translation must reflect that it is Allah Who is speaking. At the same time, readers must not be put off by a level of speech that sounds so stilted and artificial that it loses credibility. The difference can be slight, but remains relevant, as when in 17: 40 we either read "Verily, you are *uttering a dreadful saying*"! (Asad) or "Verily, ye speak an awful word" (Pickthall).

Yet, as we will see below, quite a few other, more substantial objections have been made against Asad's translation. In fact, no other translation is as controversial and is as heatedly debated as his.

Many have written more books than Asad. Few, however, have left a comparable impact. On the basis of his writings alone, Asad was indeed Austria's (and Europe's) greatest gift to Islam in the 20th century, René Guénon, Marmaduke Pickthall, Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings notwithstanding.

IV

However, Asad was not only an intellectual who was guided by

reason and was skeptical of Sufism. He also was a political activist and an inquisitive Near East correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung* (1922-26); advisor to King 'Abd al-'Aziz (in competition with the British influence peddler Harry St. John Philby); freedom fighter against the Italian occupation of Libya; an intellectual co-founder of Pakistan and its ambassador to the United Nations in New York.

In the Christian world, the Benedictine Order still goes by the ideal of *ora et labora* (pray and work), today phrased as *contemplation et combat* by Frere Pierre of Taizé. This ideal corresponds to the Islamic one of *al-insān al-kāmil*, a Muslim striving for perfection both in piety and action. The Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) was such a personality — as a husband, a father, a military commander, a statesman, a judge, and a mystic. Ṣalāh al-Din al-Ayyubi, Ibn Taymiyyah, 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'iri were such personalities. Muhammad Asad in his own way was a kindred spirit to these great men.

I had some idea of this combination of traits in Asad but was surprised, nevertheless, when he drove up to my hotel in Lisbon, through thick city traffic, he at the wheel, at 85 years of age!

V

Given this background, one might assume that Muhammad Asad was appreciated everywhere in the Muslim world for his high-level contribution to its renaissance; but this is not yet the case. Yes, in the West, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, Asad is much admired, and not only among the relatively recent reverts to Islam but also among the Muslim migrants from abroad. In the East, except where his friendship with Muhammad Iqbal is recalled — as among some in Pakistan, India, and Malaysia — this perhaps is not so. In fact, in the Arab world it is perhaps not considered a lack of education not to know anything about Muhammad Asad. That, in my view, is for three major reasons: (1) Some Arab Muslims tend to be somewhat skeptical if a non-native speaker of Arabic tries his hand at the translation of the foundational texts of Islam. One might ask: could al-Zamakhshari, simply because he was a Persian, have been faulted in regard to his command of Arabic. Our brethren-in-faith should, of course, have made an exception also in the case of Asad, given that his command of Arabic put many a native speaker to shame. (2) As a revert from the Mosaic faith at times Asad ran into a certain prejudice. At least some Muslims succumbed to the suspicion that he might have chosen Islam in order to

undermine and pervert it. This misgiving became intense when in 1952, after 22 years of marriage, Asad divorced his Arab wife, Munirah bint al-Husayn al-Shammari, the mother of his son Talal, and took another wife Pola Hamida, an American woman of Polish descent.

It was of little avail that in the past other Jewish converts had proved to be exceptionally good Muslims, like the former rabbi 'Abd Allah b. Salām whom Muhammad (peace be on him), according to a tradition narrated by Mu'ādh b. Jabal, had even promised a place in Paradise.¹ Alas, the same traditionist also reported about a Jew in Yemen who had accepted Islam only to desert it.² Each of Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Kathīr in their *Sirah* gives a vivid account of a whole number of Jewish hypocrites, including Sa'd b. Hunayf, who had only feigned their Islam.³ Abu Hurayrah transmitted the Prophet's complaint that he had not even been able to win over 10 rabbis to Islam.⁴ At any rate, a number of Muslims not only feared, and still fear, that —as predicted⁵ — they will split up into more than 70 sects but that the Jews and former Jews will play a role in that disaster.

(3) Such misgivings became more concrete when Asad in his translation of the Qur'an departed from its orthodox interpretation on several questions in a rather serious manner:

(a) In some cases, he departed from orthodoxy in the text of the translation itself. For instance, Asad eliminated the word *jinn* in his translation in favour of notions like good or bad impulses (derived from psychology and even psychiatry so fashionable during his youth). This approach would have been more acceptable if it had been dealt with in footnotes only. That would have been easy, given that Asad in Appendix III had explained in detail what *jinn* (and *Shaytān*) might mean in a specific context: spiritual forces, angelic forces, satanic forces, occult powers, invisible or *hitherto* unseen beings (994 f.) Thus in *Surat an-Nās*

¹ Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tabrayzi, *Mishkāt al-Masābih*, tr. Mawlana Fazlul Karim (Lahore: Malik Sirajuddin & Sons, 1979), 4: 594, *hadith* no. 153.

² Abu Dāwud Sulayman ibn Ash'ath al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, tr. Ahmad Hasan (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1984), 3: 1213, *hadith* no. 4341.

³ Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford University Press, 1955), 246; Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Reading: 1998), 231.

⁴ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhāri, *Sahih al-Bukhāri*, *Kitab al-Manāqib*, Bāb Ityān al-Yahūd al-Nabi Hina Qadima al-Madinah. (The words of the Prophet (peace be on him) in this *hadith* reads as follows: "If ten Jews would believe in me, the Jews [as a whole] would believe in me". Ed.)

⁵ Abu Dāwud, *Sunan*, 3: 1290, *hadith* no. 4579.

114: 6 Asad renders *jinn* as "invisible forces", in 41: 26 and 55: 33 as "invisible beings", and in 72: 1 and 46: 29 as "unseen beings". In the Appendix and in his footnotes to both 46: 29 and 72: 1 Asad goes so far as to imply that *jinn* here might refer to humans, i.e. strangers.

(b) As explained in Appendix IV (996-998), Asad saw in *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* a mystical experience of purely spiritual nature, not a physical occurrence: a real vision (and therefore an objective reality and not just a dream) performed by Muhammad's soul without his body. This interpretation of the miraculous events is not only supported by 'A'ishah's view and the absence of substantial *ahādith* to the contrary. Asad mainly argues that the entire occurrence happened in the non-material world. Given the popular embellishments of *isrā'* and *mi'rāj*, Asad's translation was most vehemently attacked in this context. His opponents were fond of pointing out that 'A'ishah was still a child and not yet married to the Prophet (peace be on him) when the Night Journey and Ascension took place in 621. In reply, Asad showed himself ready to accept the formulations of the traditional interpretation side by side with his own. But this compromise was not acceptable to his detractors.

(c) On the whole, Asad was accused of dealing with the Qur'an a bit too rationalistically, like a crypto-Mu'tazili: an instance in point is his interpretation of Jesus speaking in the crib; the saving of Ibrahim from the fire, and his denial of the historicity of Luqmān, Khidr, and Dhu 'l-Qarnayn. His critics saw Asad interpreting too many things as merely allegorical.

In fact, Asad saw in Luqmān a "legendary sage" and "mythological figure",¹ in Khidr a "mysterious sage" and an "allegorical figure, symbolizing mystical insight accessible to man",² and even in Dhu'l-Qarnayn an unhistorical personality whose "sole purport is a parabolic discourse on faith and ethics".³

As far as these three figures are concerned, one might be best off saying: "*wa Allahu a'lam*"! But with Ibrahim (21: 69; 29: 24) Asad finds himself on thinner ice when he deduces that he was not only not saved from the fire, but was never thrown into it. It is true that the Qur'an does not explicitly state that Ibrahim was in the fire. But to say that the phrase "*God saved him from the fire*" (29: 24) "points, rather, to the

¹ See 31: 12, n. 12.

² See 18: 65, n. 73.

³ See 18: 83, n. 81.

fact of his *not* having been thrown into it”¹ seems to place limits on Allah’s ways and power of intervention.

The same is true of Asad’s approach to Jesus’ speaking in the crib (19: 30-33). For him, these verses “seem to be in the nature of a trope, projecting the shape of things to come ... using the past tense to describe something that was to become real in the future”. Alternatively, Asad suggests that Jesus’ declarations in 19: 30-33 might have been spoken at a much later time, after he had reached maturity, so that these verses were “an anticipatory description...”.² Here again, a miracle is ruled out on merely rationalistic grounds.

(d) Many ‘*ulamā*’ took issue with Asad’s categorical rejection of the doctrine of *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*, his denial of the possibility of the abrogation of earlier Qur’anic verses by later ones, admitting *naskh* only between subsequent scriptures. For him 2: 106, 13: 39 and 87: 6 f. only deal with the *previous* divine messages, replacing “one message by another” (16: 101). This, for him, corresponds to an obvious linear ethical progression and maturation from the Old Testament (and its addressees, the Jews) via the Evangel (and its addressees, the Christians) to the last revelation, the Qur’an. In fact, it seems odd to him to assume that Allah might change His mind in the course of a few years since “there is nothing that could alter His words” (18: 27).³

Asad dismisses the opposite traditional view as erroneous and unsupported by the *Sunnah*, also pointing out that there is no unanimity about which verses had supposedly been abrogated. He even suspected that some ‘*ulamā*’ faced with what they might have perceived to be “inconsistencies” in the Qur’an, had all too eagerly resorted to abrogation instead of taking the trouble of seeking reconciliation at a higher level of interpretation.

(e) Asad’s re-interpretation of the role and rights of Muslim women were categorized by many as too apologetic.⁴ In particular, he was criticized for his interpretation of 24: 31 where he concluded from *illa ma zahara minha* that the obligation of Muslim women to cover their hair depended on the prevailing civilizational mores. According to Asad, this verse allowed “time-bound changes necessary for man’s moral and social growth”, taking into account that what is considered decent or

¹ See 21: 69, n. 64.

² See 19: 30, nn. 23 and 24.

³ See 2: 106 n. 87 and 87: 6 n. 4.

⁴ See for example A.R. Kidwai’s article in *The Muslim World Book Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer 1987, p. 70, and Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1989, p. 15.

indecent "might legitimately change over time".¹

Asad admits that most women in Arabia, during the time of revelation, wore a *khimar* (head-cover) as mentioned in 24: 31. But for him the rationale of this verse is the injunction to cover a woman's bosom, whether by *khimar* or in some other way. In other words, Allah did not order Muslim women to wear a head-cover, ensuring that their head was covered. The gist of 24:31 consists of the command to hide from view the primary and secondary female sexual organs, not a woman's hair.² Asad does mention that a woman's public exposure traditionally is restricted to her face, hands and feet, but he fails to indicate that this is based on a *hadith*.

Asad's interpretation of 33: 59 jibes with his views on 24: 31. In the injunction for women to draw upon themselves some of their outer garments (*min jalābībihinna*) he again sees a time-bound formulation, the issue being not the means (the garment) but the result (a decent dress), i.e. "a moral guideline to be observed against the ever-changing background of time and social environment".³

Many people seem to remember Asad mainly as the man who denied that Muslim women were obligated to keep their head covered in the presence of male strangers. Indeed, in the heated political debate on the question of *hijāb*, an issue on which he is mainly cited as an authority by those opposed to *hijāb*, be it in Turkey, France or Germany. On this particular issue Asad's work on the Qur'an has had a divisive effect on Muslims. Typically, after I had favourably mentioned Asad during a lecture in Washington D.C. in April 2000, the immediate response of a *shaykh* attending my lecture was: "Don't you know what Asad wrote about *Surat al-Nūr*"?⁴

VI

It was because of Asad's views, on such contentious points that the first edition of Asad's translation, which had been sponsored by some Arabs, could not see the light of the day. In consequence, Asad's relations with them became strained. Even though some of them such as Shaykh Ahmad Zaki Yamāni maintained their friendship with Asad,

¹ See 24: 31, n. 37.

² See 24: 31, n. 38.

³ See 33: 59, n. 75.

⁴ The reason for mentioning this *surah* in the present context is that it has a large number of injunctions on *hijāb* and related issues. Ed.

nevertheless, the strain that had developed presumably endured.

Be that as it may, Asad's prestige continues to grow among the present-day Muslims especially in Europe and the United States. There are some indications which give rise to the view that the world-wide revitalization and rejuvenation of Islam in the 21st century might come from the West: it might come from Los Angeles, Oxford or London rather than from Cairo or Fes or Islamabad. If this assumption is correct, the hour may come soon when appreciation of Muhammad Asad's thought will become a truly global phenomenon.

(in: *Islamic Studies* (Islamabad), 39/2 (2000), pp. 233-247); also in German "Muhammad Asad: Europas Geschenk an den Islam," in: *Al-Islam: Zeitschrift von Muslimen in Deutschland*, Nr. 5, 2000, pp. 11-19; also in: *Der-Wisch* (Vienna), Nr. 3 (March 2005), pp. 140-22).

MARTIN KRAMER

THE ROAD FROM MECCA: MUHAMMAD ASAD (BORN LEOPOLD WEISS)

In August 1954, there appeared in America a remarkable book, written by an author named Muhammad Asad and bearing the title *The Road to Mecca*. The book, a combination of memoir and travelogue, told the story of a convert to Islam who had crossed the spiritual deserts of Europe and the sand deserts of Arabia, on a trek that brought him ultimately to the oasis of Islamic belief. The book immediately won critical acclaim, most notably in the prestige press of New York, where Simon and Schuster had published it. One reviewer, writing in *The New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, called it an "intensely interesting and moving book."¹ Another reviewer, on the pages of *The New York Times*, placed the book in the pantheon of Arabian travel literature: "Not since Freya Stark," he wrote, "has anyone written so happily about Arabia as the Galician now known as Muhammad Asad."²

Muhammad Asad (1900-92) was a converted Jew, named Leopold Weiss at birth. He was no ordinary convert. Asad not only sought personal fulfillment in his adopted faith. He tried to affect the course of contemporary Islam, as an author, activist, diplomat, and translator of the Qur'an. Muhammad Asad died in February 1992 at the age of ninety-one, so that his career may be said to have paralleled the emergence of every trend in contemporary Islam.

As yet, however, there is no biography of Asad, and considerable obstacles await all who would attempt one. The most formidable of these is that the principal source for Asad's life remains Asad. No doubt this obstacle might be overcome, and this essay makes

¹ S.C. Chew, review of *The Road to Mecca* in *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 15 August 1954.

² Robert Payne, review of *The Road to Mecca* in *New York Times*, 15 August 1954.

use of several additional sources for Asad's life. But the purpose here is more modest. It is to draw a very general sketch of Asad's life, and to place some emphasis upon the Jewish dimension of Muhammad Asad. For while Asad obviously distanced himself from Judaism, he adhered to a set of ideals that suffused the Jewish milieu from which he emerged. His failure to impart these ideals to contemporary Islam, and a repetitious pattern of rejection by his Muslim coreligionists, made of him a wandering Muslim, whose road from Mecca traversed an uncomprehending Islam before winding back to the refuge of the West.

The Drift from Judaism

Leopold Weiss was born on 12 July 1900, in the town of Lvóv (Lemberg) in eastern Galicia, then a part of the Habsburg Empire (Lvóv is today in Ukraine). By the turn of the century, Jews formed a quarter to a third of the population of Lvóv, a town inhabited mostly by Poles and Ukrainians. The Jewish community had grown and prospered over the previous century, expanding from commerce into industry and banking. Weiss's mother, Malka, was the daughter of a wealthy local banker, Menahem Mendel Feigenbaum. The family lived comfortably, and, wrote Weiss, lived for the children.¹

From Weiss's own account, his roots in Judaism were deeper on his father's side. His paternal grandfather, Benjamin Weiss, had been one of a succession of orthodox rabbis in Czernovitz in Bukovina. Weiss remembered his grandfather as a white-bearded man who loved chess, mathematics and astronomy, but who still held rabbinic learning in the highest regard, and so wished his son to enter the rabbinate. Weiss's father, Akiva, did study Talmud by day, but by night he secretly learned the curriculum of the humanistic *gymnasium*. Akiva Weiss eventually announced his open break from rabbinics, a rebellion that would presage his son's own very different break. But Akiva did not realize his dream of studying physics, because circumstances compelled him to take up the more practical profession of a barrister. He practiced first in Lvóv, then in Vienna, where the Weiss family settled before the First World War.

Weiss testifies that his parents had little religious faith. For

¹ Details on the family in Lodewijk Brunt, "Een Jood in Arabie; over het leven van Muhammad Asad," in *Neveh Ya'akov: Jubilee Volume Presented to Dr. Jaap Meijer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, eds. Lea Dasberg and Jonathan N. Cohen (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1982), 182.

them, Judaism had become, in his words, "the wooden ritual of those who clung by habit — and only by habit — to their religious heritage." He later came to suspect that his father regarded all religion as outmoded superstition. But in deference to family tradition and to his grandfathers, young Leopold — "Poldi" to his family — was made to spend long hours with a tutor, studying the Hebrew Bible, Targum, Talmud, Mishna, and Gemarra. "By the age of thirteen," he attested, "I not only could read Hebrew with great fluency but also spoke it freely." He studied Targum "just as if I had been destined for a rabbinical career," and he could "discuss with a good deal of self-assurance the differences between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds."¹

Nonetheless, Weiss developed what he called "a supercilious feeling" toward the premises of Judaism. While he did not disagree with its moral precepts, it seemed to him that the God of the Hebrew Bible and Talmud "was unduly concerned with the ritual by means of which His worshippers were supposed to worship Him." Moreover, this God seemed "strangely preoccupied with the destinies of one particular nation, the Hebrews." Far from being the creator and sustainer of mankind, the God of the Hebrews appeared to be a tribal deity, "adjusting all creation to the requirements of a 'chosen people'." Weiss's studies thus led him away from Judaism, although he later allowed that "they helped me understand the fundamental purpose of religion as such, whatever its form."²

But this early disillusionment with Judaism did not lead to the pursuit of spiritual alternatives. In 1918, Weiss entered the University of Vienna. Days were given to the study of art history; evenings were spent in cafes, listening to the disputations of Vienna's psychoanalysts. ("The stimulus of Freud's ideas was as intoxicating to me as potent wine.")³ Nights were given to passions. ("I rather gloried, like so many others of my generation, in what was considered a 'rebellion against the hollow conventions.'").⁴ But as his studies progressed, the prospect of a life in academe lost appeal. In 1920, Weiss defied his father's wishes and left Vienna for Berlin to seek a career in journalism. There he joined the *littérateurs* at the Café des Westens, sold a few film scripts, and landed a job with a news agency."

¹ Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 55.

² *Ibid.*, 55-56.

³ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

Eastern Exposure

In the midst of this fairly unremarkable climb, Leopold Weiss took an unexpected detour. Early in 1922, a maternal uncle, Dorian Feigenbaum, invited Weiss to visit Jerusalem. Dorian, a psychoanalyst and pupil of Freud, had initiated Weiss to psychoanalysis a few years earlier in Vienna. Now he headed a mental institution in Jerusalem. Weiss accepted the invitation, arriving in Egypt by ship and then in Palestine by train. In Jerusalem, he lived in Dorian's house, situated inside the old city a few steps from the Jaffa Gate. It was from this base that Leopold Weiss would first explore the realities of Islam. But his exploration would be prefaced by another discovery, of the immoralities of Zionism.

This stand was not a family inheritance. Although Dorian did not consider himself a Zionist, Weiss had another uncle in Jerusalem who was very much an ardent Zionist. Aryeh Feigenbaum (1885-1981), an ophthalmologist, had immigrated to Palestine in 1913, and became a leading authority on trachoma whose Jerusalem clinics were frequented by thousands of Arabs and Jews. In 1920, he founded the first Hebrew medical journal; from 1922, he headed the ophthalmologic department at Hadassah Hospital.¹ Weiss later omitted all mention of his Zionist uncle from *The Road to Mecca* — one of many suggestive omissions, hinting that the distancing from family and Zionism was linked.

But Weiss always presented his anti-Zionism as a simple moral imperative. "I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism," Weiss would later affirm. "I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a foreign Great Power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining to majority in the country and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been since time immemorial."² This moral position was bolstered by a flash of insight Weiss experienced near the Jaffa Gate while observing a bedouin Arab,

¹ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Feigenbaum, Aryeh"; Haviv Kena'an, "Prof. A. Feigenbaum — Hasid ha-dugmah ha-ishit," *Ha'aretz*, 1 August 1964. The omission is all the more striking in that, at one point in *The Road to Mecca*, Asad writes that the eyes of Jerusalem's Arabs "seemed to remain clear and untouched by age — unless they happened to be affected by trachoma, that evil 'Egyptian' eye disease which is the curse of all countries east of the Mediterranean." *Road to Mecca*, 92.

² Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 93.

“silhouetted against the silver-grey sky like a figure from an old legend.” Perhaps, he fantasized, this was “one of that handful of young warriors who had accompanied young David on his flight from the dark jealousy of Saul, his king?” Then, he says, “I knew, with that clarity which sometimes bursts within us like lightening and lights up the world for the length of a heartbeat, that David and David’s time, like Abraham and Abraham’s time, were closer to their Arabian roots — and so to the beduin of to-day — than to the Jew of today, who claims to be their descendant.”¹

In Jerusalem, Weiss began to confront Zionist leaders with the Arab question at every turn. He raised it both with Menahem Ussishkin (1863-1941) and Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), and soon gained a reputation as a sympathizer of the Arab cause. Weiss also credited a new friend with assisting him greatly in Jerusalem: the Dutch poet and journalist Jacob Israël de Haan (1881-1924). By this time, De Haan’s strange career had already taken its many turns: he had gone from socialist agitator to religious mystic, from ardent Zionist to fervent anti-Zionist. The Haganah later assassinated De Haan in 1924. De Haan fed Weiss’s rejection of Zionism with grist, and also helped Weiss find journalistic work. And it was through De Haan that Weiss met the Emir ‘Abdallah (1882-1951) in the summer of 1923 — his first in a lifetime of meetings with Arab heads of state.

In Palestine, Weiss became a stringer for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, where he wrote against Zionism and for the cause of Muslim and Arab nationalism, with a strong anti-British bias. He published a small book on the subject in 1924,² and this so inspired the confidence of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that it commissioned him to travel more widely still, to collect information for a full-scale book. Weiss made the trip, which lasted two years. At its outset, he found a new source of inspiration, during a stay in Cairo: Shaykh Mustafa al-Marāghi (1881-1945), a brilliant reformist theologian who later became rector of al-Azhar.³ This

¹ Ibid., 91.

² Leopold Weiss, *Unromantisches Morgenland; aus dem Tagebuch einer Reise* (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Societats-Drukerei, 1924). The book is summarized by Wolf Kaiser, *Palästina-Erez Israel: Deutschsprachige Reisebeschreibungen jüdischer Autoren von der Jahrhundertwende bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1992), 267-83. Kaiser also discusses some of the contemporary criticism of reviewers. Asad wrote of his book that, “although its anti-Zionist attitude and unusual predilection for the Arabs caused something of a flutter in the German press, I am afraid it did not sell very well.” Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 185.

³ Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 188.

was Weiss's first contact with Islamic reformism, and it left a profound impression upon him. Weiss concluded that the abysmal state of the Muslims could not be attributed to Islam, as its Western critics claimed, but to a misreading of Islam. When properly interpreted, in a modern light, Islam could lead Muslims forward, while offering spiritual sustenance that Judaism and Christianity had ceased to provide. Weiss spent the better part of the next two years traveling through Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, growing ever more fascinated by Islam in its myriad forms.

The Conversion

Upon concluding his travels, Weiss returned to Frankfurt to write his book. There he also married Elsa, a widow, "probably the finest representative of the pure 'Nordic' type I have ever encountered," a woman fifteen years his senior, whom he had met before his last travels.¹ He was now settled into a comfortable routine. Yet he made no progress on his book: he was preoccupied and distracted, unable to put pen to paper in a summation of his travels. A quarrel with the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* over his writer's block culminated in his resignation, and he moved to Berlin, where he took up Islamic studies and wrote as a stringer for lesser newspapers.

It was there, in September 1926, that Weiss experienced his second epiphany. He had had a flash of insight near the Jaffa Gate: the Arabs were the heirs of the biblical Hebrews, not the Jews. Now, on the Berlin subway, he had another flash. Watching the people on this train, in their finery and prosperity, he noticed that none smiled. Although positioned at the pinnacle of Western material achievement, they were unhappy. Returning to his flat, he cast a glance at a copy of the Qur'an he had been reading, and his eye settled upon the verse that reads: "You are obsessed by greed for more and more / Until you go down to your graves." And then later, in the same verse: "Nay, if you but knew it with the knowledge of certainty, / You would indeed see the hell you are in."² All doubt that the Qur'an was a God-inspired book vanished, wrote Weiss. He went to the leader of the Berlin Islamic Society, declared his adherence to Islam, and took the name Muhammad Asad.

Why the conversion? In 1934, Asad wrote that he had no

¹ Ibid., 142.

² Qur'an, 102 (Surat al-Takāthur). The translation is Asad's.

satisfactory answer. He could not say which aspect of Islam appealed to him more than another, except that Islam seemed to him "harmoniously conceived... nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure." But he still found it difficult to analyze his motives. "After all, it was a matter of love; and love is composed of many things: of our desires and our loneliness, of our high aims and our shortcomings, of our strength and our weakness."¹ In the Feigenbaum family, it was more commonly thought that Asad's conversion stemmed from a hatred of his father, generalized to a contempt for the faith and people of his birth. Asad wrote to his father informing him of his conversion, but got no answer.

"Some months later my sister wrote, telling me that he considered me dead... Thereupon I sent him another letter, assuring him that my acceptance of Islam did not change anything in my attitude toward him or my love for him; that, on the contrary, Islam enjoined upon me to love and honour my parents above all other people... But this letter also remained unanswered."²

Asad's wife Elsa converted to Islam a few weeks later, and in January 1927 they left for Mecca, accompanied by Elsa's son from her previous marriage. On arrival, Weiss made his first pilgrimage; a moving passage at the end of *The Road to Mecca* describes his circumambulation of Ka'ba. Tragically, Elsa died nine days later, of a tropical disease, and her parents reclaimed her son a year later.

Asad of Arabia

So began Asad's Saudi period, which would form him as a Muslim. His six years in Saudi Arabia are recounted in *The Road to Mecca* in selective detail. Asad portrayed himself as a member of the inner circle of King Ibn Saud (1880-1953), dividing his time between religious study in Medina and palace politics in Riyadh. This intimacy with Ibn Saud can be confirmed in broad lines by an independent source. In late 1928, an Iraqi named Abdallah Damluji, who had been an adviser to Ibn Saud, submitted a report to the British on "Bolshevik and Soviet

¹ Muhammad Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934; reprint, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashaf, 1991), 4.

² Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 311.

penetration” of the Hijaz. It represents perhaps the most succinct confirmation of the role played by Asad in Saudi Arabia.

“Before concluding, I must bring attention to the person known as Asadullah von Weiss, formerly an Austrian Jew, now a Muslim, who resides presently near the holy shrine in Mecca. This Austrian Leopold von Weiss came to the Hijaz two years ago, claiming he had become a Muslim out of love for this religion and in pure belief in it. I do not know why, but his words were accepted without opposition, and he entered Mecca without impediment. He did so at a time when no one like him was allowed to do the same, the Hijaz government having recently passing a law providing that those like him must wait two years under surveillance, so that the government can be certain of their Islam before their entry into Mecca. Since that time, Leopold von Weiss has remained in Mecca, wandering the country and mixing with people of every class and with government persons. He then traveled to Medina, and stayed there and in its environs for several months. Then he was able — I have no idea how — to travel to Riyadh with King Ibn Saud last year, and he stayed in Riyadh for five months, seeing and hearing all that happened, mingling with the people and speaking with persons of the government. He does not seem to me to be a learned or professional man. His apparent purpose is to obtain news from the King, and especially from Shaykh Yusuf Yāsin, secretary to the King [and editor of the official newspaper *Umm al-Qura*]. Asadullah uses this news to produce articles for some German and Austrian newspapers, in reply to the distasteful things written by some European newspapers on the Hijazi-Najdi court. This is the occupation of the Austrian Jew Leopold von Weiss, now Haj Asadullah the Muslim. What is the real mission which makes him endure the greatest discomforts and the worst conditions of life? On what basis rests the close intimacy between him and Shaykh Yusuf Yāsin? Is there some connection between von Weiss and the Bolshevik consulate in Jidda? These are mysteries about which it is difficult to know the truth.”¹

¹ Arabic report (with translation) by Dr. Abdullah Damluji, no date, included in despatch from Political Secretary of High Commissioner for Iraq (Baghdad) to Consul (Jiddah), 18 December 1928, Public Records Office (London), FO

For British intelligence of the time, Bolshevism was an obsession, and Damluji's insinuation can be discounted. But from this account it is clear that Asad did have exceptional access to the court of Ibn Saud. It is also clear that his status was not that of an adviser, but of a privileged observer, admitted to the court as part of the earliest Saudi efforts at public relations. Ibn Saud kept Asad close to him because this useful contact wrote flattering articles about him for various newspapers in continental Europe. (These newspapers, Asad wrote, "provide me with my livelihood.")¹

According to Asad, he did finally become a secret agent of sorts: Ibn Saud employed him on a clandestine mission to Kuwait in 1929, to trace the funds and guns that were flowing to Faysal al-Dawish, a rebel against Ibn Saud's rule. Asad determined that Britain was behind the rebellion, and he wrote so for the foreign papers, much to Ibn Saud's satisfaction. Asad also began to settle down. He married twice in Saudi Arabia: first in 1928 to a woman from the Mutayr tribe, and in 1930, following a divorce, to Munira, from a branch of the Shammar. They established a household in Medina, and she bore him a son, Talal. Arabia was his home, so he worked to persuade himself: the Arabian sky was "the same sky," the same sky that "vaulted over the long trek of my ancestors, those wandering herdsmen-warriors" — "that small beduin tribe of Hebrews."³

Arabia's sky enchanted Asad — but Arabia's ruler did not. Asad had shared the hope that Ibn Saud would "bring about a revival of the Islamic idea in its fullest sense." But as Ibn Saud consolidated his power, lamented Asad, "it became evident that Ibn Saud was no more than a king — a king aiming no higher than so many other autocratic Eastern rulers before him." Asad's indictment grew long, and he later made it public in *The Road to Mecca*. True, Ibn Saud had established order, but he had done so "by harsh laws and punitive measures and not by inculcating in the people a sense of civic responsibility." He had "done nothing to build up an equitable, progressive society." "He indulges and allows

967/22. Damluji had left Ibn Saud's service in September 1928 and returned to Iraq.

¹ Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 48.

² Ibid., chap. viii, "Jinns." On the Dawish affair, see Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 117-40.

³ Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 49.

those around him to indulge in the most extravagant and senseless luxuries." He had "neglected the education even of his own sons and thus left them poorly equipped for the tasks that lie before them." And he was incapable of self-examination, while the "innumerable hangers-on who live off his bounty certainly do nothing to counteract this unfortunate tendency." Asad's final verdict was that Ibn Saud's life constituted a "tragic waste":

"Belying the tremendous promise of his younger years, when he appeared to be a dreamer of stirring dreams, he has broken — perhaps without realizing it himself — the spirit of a high-strung nation that had been wont to look up to him as to a God-sent leader. They had expected too much of him to bear the disappointment of their expectations with equanimity; and some of the best among the people of Najd now speak in bitter terms of what they consider a betrayal of their trust."

Ibn Saud, in sum, was "an eagle who never really took to wing," a king who never rose beyond "a benevolent tribal chieftain on an immensely enlarged scale."¹

Disappointed with Ibn Saud, Asad commenced a quest for the ruler, state, or society which would embody his ideal Islam. He briefly pinned his hopes on the Sanusi movement in Cyrenaica:

"Like so many other Muslims, I had for years pinned my hopes on Ibn Saud as the potential leader of an Islamic revival; and now that these hopes had proved futile, I could see in the entire Muslim world only one movement that genuinely strove for the fulfillment of the ideal of an Islamic society: the Sanusi movement, now fighting a last-ditch battle for survival."²

According to Asad, he went on a secret mission to Cyrenaica on behalf of the Grand Sanusi, Sayyid Ahmad (1873-1932), then in exile in Saudi Arabia, to transmit plans for continuing the anti-Italian struggle to the remnant of the Sanusi forces. But the mission, in January 1931, was a futile one: Italian forces crushed the last of the Sanusi resistance later that year.³

¹ Ibid., 177-81, for these assessments of Ibn Saud.

² Ibid, 325.

³ Ibid., chap, xi, "Jihad."

By this time, Asad had fallen from favor. He gave no explanation in *The Road to Mecca* for his break with Ibn Saud, except his personal disappointment with the monarch. But other explanations also gained circulation. Some claimed that his last marriage proved his undoing: members of his wife's family were suspected of intrigues against Ibn Saud. Others pointed to his Jewish origins as a growing liability after 1929, when Arab-Jewish tensions in Palestine exploded in violence. What is certain is that he left Saudi Arabia in 1932, with the declared aim of traveling through India, Turkestan, China, and Indonesia.

Passage to India

Asad began with a "lecture tour" to India. According to British intelligence sources, Asad had linked up with an Amritsar activist, one Ismā'il Ghaznavi, and intended to tour India "with a view to get into touch with all important workers." Asad arrived in Karachi by ship in June 1932, and left promptly for Amritsar.¹ There and in neighboring Lahore, he involved himself with the local community of Kashmiri Muslims, and in 1933 he made an appearance in Srinagar, where an intelligence report again had him spreading Bolshevik ideas.²

For Asad, the real attraction of Kashmir would have resided in its predicament as contested ground, where a British-backed *mahārāja* ruled a discontented Muslim population. Beginning in 1931, Kashmiri Muslims in Punjab organized an extensive "agitation" in support of the Muslims in Kashmir. Hundreds of bands of Muslim volunteers crossed illegally from Punjab into Kashmir, and thousands were arrested. By early 1932, the disturbances had subsided, but the Kashmir government remained ever-wary.³ Just what Asad did in Kashmir is uncertain. But on

¹ "History sheet of Herr Leopold Weiss Alias Mohammad Asad Ullah Vyce. An Austrian Convert to Mohammadanism," prepared by the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India, included in letter from E. J.D. Colvin, Political Secretary, His Highness' Government Jammu and Kashmir (Jammu) to Lieut.-Col. L.E. Lang, Resident in Kashmir (Sialkot), 30 January 1934, India Office Records, R/1/1/4670. In *The Road to Mecca*, Asad dates his last Arabian journey to the late summer of 1932, which would place his final arrival in India at a later date than June.

² C.I.D. report of 20 November 1933, India Office Records, R/1/1/4670.

³ On the Kashmir "agitation" of 1931-32, see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 96-99.

learning of his presence, the Kashmir government immediately wanted him "externed," although the police had no evidence to substantiate the intelligence report, and there appeared to be legal obstacles to "externing" a European national.¹

With or without such prompting, Asad soon retreated from Kashmir to Lahore. There he met the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), himself of Kashmiri descent, who persuaded Asad to remain in India and work "to elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state."² From this point forward, Asad would be a Muslim intellectual, thinking, lecturing and writing on Islamic culture and law. In March 1934 he published a pamphlet entitled *Islam at the Crossroads*, his first venture into Islamic thought. This work can only be described as a diatribe against the materialism of the West — as Asad put it, a case of "Islam *versus* Western civilization." Here Asad developed themes which would become widespread later in Islamic fundamentalist thought. Asad drew a straight line between the Crusades and modern imperialism, and held Western orientalist to blame for their distortions of Islam. This text went through repeated printings and editions in India and Pakistan. More importantly, however, it appeared in an Arabic translation in Beirut in 1946. Under the Arabic title *al-Islam 'ala mustariq al-turūq*, it was published in numerous editions through the 1940s and 1950s. This translation had a crucial influence upon the early writings of the Islamist theoretician Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), who drew extensively upon Asad in developing the idea of "Crusaderism."

In 1936, Asad found a new benefactor. The Nizam of Hyderabad had established a journal under his patronage entitled *Islamic Culture*, first edited by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), a British convert to Islam.³ Pickthall, best known for his English translation of the Qur'an, died in 1936, at which point Asad assumed the editorship of the journal. This placed Asad in touch with a wide range of orientalist and Indian Muslim scholarship, and he himself began to write scholarly pieces and translate texts.⁴

¹ Lieut-Col. L.E. Lang, Resident in Kashmir (Sialkot) to B. J. Glancy, Political Secretary, Government of India, Foreign and Political Department (New Delhi), 31 January 1934, India Office Records, R/1/1/4670.

² Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 2.

³ On the journal, see Peter Clark, *Marmaduke Pickthall: British Muslim* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 61-62.

⁴ For a sample of his work, see his article "Towards a Resurrection of Thought," *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad) 11 (1937): 7-16.

Intrusion of War

But another obligation began to assert itself— an obligation from the past. In *The Road to Mecca*, Asad wrote that his relationship with his father was resumed in 1935, after his father had come to “understand and appreciate the reasons for my conversion to Islam.” Although they never met in person again, wrote Asad, they corresponded continuously until 1942.¹ However, Asad did return to Europe in the spring of 1939, with the intention of saving his endangered family. Nazi Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, enforcing the Nuremberg Laws in May. The life of Viennese Jewry became a succession of confiscations, persecutions, pogroms, and deportations. In October 1938, Asad resigned the editorship of *Islamic Culture*, and then left India. In April 1939, his Austrian passport was visaed in Vienna for entry to Britain and British India.² Afterwards he arrived in London, where he asked that this visa be extended: “I beg you to give me a prolongation of this visa till the end of this year as my parents will come in about 4 to 5 months. I have to settle many things for them.”³ (“Parents” was Asad’s shorthand for his father and stepmother; his own mother had died in 1919.) This evidence hints that Asad made an eleventh-hour attempt at rescuing his Jewish family before returning to India in the summer of 1939.

But whatever the scope of these efforts, they ended abruptly with the German invasion of Poland and the British declaration of war against Germany in September 1939. Asad was detained immediately in India as an enemy national, and he spent the next six years in internment camps with Germans, Austrians, and Italians who had been collected from all over British-ruled Asia. Asad’s camp, he wrote, was peopled by “both Nazis and anti-Nazis as well as Fascists and anti-Fascists.”⁴ During his internment, he established contact with his uncle in

¹ Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 311 n.

² India Office Records, L/P&J/7/2678. This includes an extract, from Weiss’s passport, of a visa for the United Kingdom and British India, granted at Vienna and issued on 24 April 1939. The authorization for the visa came directly from the Government of India in New Delhi, 9 February 1939.

³ Weiss, undated note to India Office in London, received at India Office on 8 June 1939; India Office Records, L/P&J/7/2678. Weiss gave his London address as 119, Old Church Street, Chelsea, S.W. 3.

⁴ Muhammad Asad, *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1987), 1.

Jerusalem, Aryeh Feigenbaum, who sent him food, clothes, and money.¹ Asad was only released in August 1945. By then, the worst had befallen his family in Europe: his father, stepmother, and a sister were deported from Vienna in 1942, and they perished in the camps.

Asad never wrote of his long years of detention. He was the only Muslim in his camp, and it seems he deliberately detached himself from his surroundings and the war, by thinking only of the "cultural chaos" into which Muslims had been plunged. "I can still see myself pacing day-in and day-out over the great length of our barrack room," asking himself, why Muslims had failed to reach an "unambiguously agreed-upon concept of the Law."² He would not allow Europe's war to become his war, or the suffering of the Jews to become his suffering, as he moved ever more resolutely to a consolidation of his Muslim identity.

Upon Asad's release, he wholly identified with the cause of Pakistan, which he saw not simply as a refuge, but as the framework for an ideal Islamic polity. In 1947, Asad became director of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction in the new state, and he gave himself over to formulating proposals for its constitution. Asad's purpose in these proposals is clear: it is to establish an Islamic state as a liberal, multiparty parliamentary democracy. In the 1930s and 1940s, the idea of the Islamic state, in the hands of many ideologues, had been presented as antithetical to democracy, and similar to the totalitarian states of central Europe. Asad's work challenged that trend, finding evidence in the Islamic sources for elections, parliamentary legislation, and political parties.

But his own proposals, published in March 1948 as *Islamic Constitution-Making*, were never implemented. "Only very few, if any, of my suggestions have been utilized in the (now abolished) Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; perhaps only in the Preamble, adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, can an echo of those suggestions be found."³ Pakistan, he later said, did not work out as Iqbal and he had hoped it would. The new state had been "an historical necessity," and without it, "Muslims would have been submerged in the much more developed and intellectually and economically stronger

¹ Yossi Melman, "Goralo ha-Yehudi shel Muhammad Asad," *Ha'aretz*, 21 April 1989.

² Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 1.

³ Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (new ed.; Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), xi. This book built upon his *Islamic Constitution-Making*.

Hindu society." But "unfortunately it did not quite develop in the way we wanted it to. Iqbal's vision of Pakistan was quite different to that of Mohammed Ali Jinnah [1876-1948, first governor-general of Pakistan], who did not in the beginning want a separation."¹ Pakistan became a state for Muslims, but its secular founders put aside its mission as an Islamic state. In 1949, Asad left domestic politics to join Pakistan's foreign service, eventually rising to the position of head of the Middle East Division of the foreign ministry. His transformation was now complete, down to his Pakistani *achkan* and black fur cap. In the beginning of 1952, after twenty years of continuous residence in the subcontinent, he came to New York, as Pakistan's minister plenipotentiary to the United Nations.

The West Again

So began Asad's road back to the West — a choice that would bring him fame and sever his links to living Islam. He came to New York alone, without his wife and son, and lived in a penthouse in Manhattan, attended by a servant-driver.² He soon found a new love, a striking contrast to his Arabian wife of over twenty years: Pola Hamida, an American woman of Polish Catholic descent who had converted to Islam. Asad's marriage to Munira now came undone, and he married Pola Hamida before a civil judge in New York in November 1952. He would remain with her for the next forty years, and this marriage to a Western convert presaged his evolving preference for an ideal Islam, distinct from the born Muslims who practiced it.

For some months in New York, Asad also reestablished a tie to his family in Israel. At the time, Aryeh Feigenbaum's daughter, Hemdah (1916-87), was living in New York with her husband, Harry (Zvi) Zinder (1909-91), press officer at Israel's information office (and later director of the Voice of Israel). Zinder later told an Israeli journalist the story of how Asad would dine with him in out-of-the-way restaurants, or visit the Zinder's home in Forest Hills. Asad even attended the bar mitvah of the Zinder's son, and the Zinders attended his marriage to Pola Hamida. Zinder reported the contents of his table talk with Asad back to Jerusalem. Asad, he noted, remained an unequivocal enemy of Israel, but it might be possible to soften his animosity, and it would be worth the

¹ Mushtak Parker, "Death of a Muslim Mentor," *Middle East*, May 1992, 29.

² Melman, "Goralo ha-Yehudi," quoting a despatch by Harry Zinder.

effort, given Asad's solid standing in the Pakistani foreign ministry. According to Zinder, the Mossad responded by proposing that he try to recruit Asad for pay, a proposal Zinder rejected "with both hands." "I knew he would refuse any payment," said Zinder years later, "that he would be enraged by the idea, and that he would sever all contact with me." In time, the contact weakened anyway; according to Zinder, Pola Hamida disapproved of Asad maintaining close ties with his family in particular, and Jews in general. Still, according to Zinder, Asad continued for some years to correspond with Hemdah on family matters.¹

There could be no doubt from Asad's writing, and from Zinder's testimony, that Asad remained a fervent anti-Zionist. Yet for many years, Asad left the systematic indictment of the modern-day state of Israel to others. In 1947 he was fully preoccupied with the partition of India, and offered no published comment on the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel. In the years that followed the 1967 war, he spoke out more frequently, especially on Jerusalem. "We cannot ever reconcile ourselves to the view, so complacently accepted in the West, that Jerusalem is to be the capital of the State of Israel," he wrote. "In a conceivably free Palestine — a state in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could live side by side in full political and cultural equality — the Muslim community should be specifically entrusted with the custody of Jerusalem as a city open to all three communities."² But given the fever of anti-Israel passion in the Arab world after 1967, Asad's criticism could only be described as restrained. As Pakistan was far removed from the conflict, more would not have been expected of him.

But Asad failed to meet other Pakistani expectations. One of Asad's colleagues on the Pakistani delegation made a scandal of his romance with Pola Hamida, and Pakistan's Prime Minister, Khwaja Nāzimuddin, reportedly reacted strongly against the marriage. At the end of 1952, Asad offered his resignation, in the expectation his position would be confirmed. To his surprise, his resignation was accepted. It was not a clean break, and when Nāzimuddin fell from power in the spring of 1953, the prospect of Asad's return to Pakistani service seemed real. But no offer materialized, and Asad was now pressed for funds. Acting upon the advice of an American friend, he proposed to write his story for the New York publisher Simon and Schuster, which

¹ Ibid., quoting a despatch by Harry Zinder.

² Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 169, 173.

offered him a contract and an advance.¹

Asad thus began work on the book that would make him famous. *The Road to Mecca*, written in New York, appeared in 1954, and won widespread praise for its combination of spiritual searching and desert adventure. As a testimony of conversion to Islam, *The Road to Mecca* is still unsurpassed, and its continued re-publication in Western languages attests to its power, for both general readers and sympathizers of Islam. An example of its influence may be found in the testimony of a twenty-one-year-old American Jewish woman named Margaret Marcus (b. 1934). Asad's book found a place on the shelves of the public library in Mamaroneck, New York, near her home. Her parents would not let her take out the book, so she read it in the library over and over: "What he could do, I thought I could also do, only how much harder for a single woman than for a man! But I vowed to Allah that at the first opportunity, I would follow his example."² The young woman later converted to Islam, took the name Maryam Jameelah, and moved to Pakistan, where she became one of the best-known ideologues of Islamic fundamentalism, famous for her methodical indictments of the West.³

One Western convert, however, took a dim view of Asad's book: H. St. John ("Abdullah") Philby (1885-1960). Philby, too, had converted to Islam in 1930, assuming Asad's place as the convert in the court of Ibn Saud. He, too, had dabbled in exploration and politics, and he had strong views on Asad's attempts at both. In his review of *The Road to Mecca*, Philby accused "Herr Weiss" of "vagueness and unusual naïveté." According to Philby, Asad was no more than a journalist in search of a story, a man without any flair for geographical work or political analysis.

"His bazar scenes, religious festivals, desert sunsets, *et hoc genus omne* of local color suggest a patchwork of newspaper articles or cuttings strung together for a new[s] story, in which the *leit-motiv* is provided by his own gropings toward an emotional denouement."

¹ Harry Zinder (New York) to Abba Eban, 30 April 1953, Israel State Archives, ISA/R693/Box 96, File 14.

² Maryam Jameelah, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth in America (1945-1962)* (Lahore: Muhammad Yusuf Khan, 1989), 109.

³ *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, s.v. "Jameelah, Maryam."

In his most damaging insinuation, Philby wrote that there was "no independent contemporary evidence" that Asad had undertaken "secret missions" for Ibn Saud or the Grand Sanusi.¹

If the book's value as a record of politics and exploration was doubtful, then at least it served as a faithful personal memoir. Or did it? On many points, noted Judd Teller (1912-72) in a review in *Commentary*, Asad had nothing to say on matters that demanded a say in the personal memoir of any European Jew. One of these was Asad's experience of Europe's anti-Semitism, nowhere mentioned by the author.

"Yet he was born in Galicia, where the Jews were caught up as scapegoats in the power struggles of the anti-Semitic Ukrainians and Poles and the dubiously tolerant Austrian government. He was brought up in Vienna, when it was the capital of European anti-Semitism. He left Berlin for his first visit to Palestine in the year when racist-nationalists assassinated Walter Rathenau. Did all this leave him untouched?"²

Both Philby and Teller complained of the absence of another crucial point: Asad gave no reason for his decision to leave Arabia. (Teller speculated that it stemmed from heightened Jewish-Arab tensions in Palestine.) These criticisms suggested what is now obvious: *The Road to Mecca* cannot be read as a document of historical truth about Arabia, Ibn Saud, or even the author's life. It is an impressionistic self-portrait that suggests more than it tells. The face of its subject is in half-shadow.

But the omissions and elisions of the book did not detract from its commercial success. *The Road to Mecca* was translated from English into the major languages of Europe, and the royalties must have represented a windfall. The book also created demand for Asad's services as a lecturer, and his reputation in the West reached its pinnacle.

But in Muslim lands, especially among Muslim activists, his choices raised troubling questions. The Pakistani ideologue Maulana Maududi (1903-79), in a letter written in 1961, expressed misgivings:

"I have great respect for [Asad's] exposition of Islamic ideas and

¹ H. St. John B. Philby, review of *The Road to Mecca*, in *Middle East Journal* 9 (winter 1955): 81-82.

² Judd Teller, review of *The Road to Mecca*, in *Commentary* 18 (September 1954): 280.

especially his criticism of Western culture and its materialistic philosophies. I am sorry to say, however, that although in the early days of his conversion, he was a staunch, practicing Muslim, gradually he drifted close to the ways of the so called "progressive" Muslim just like the "reformed" Jews. Recently his divorce from his Arab wife and marriage to a modern American girl hastened this process of deviation more definitely.... Once a man begins to live the life of a true Muslim, all his capabilities lose their "market value." It is the same sad story with Muhammad Asad, who had always been accustomed to a high and modern standard of living and after embracing Islam, had to face the severest financial difficulties. As a result, he was forced to make one compromise after another."¹

Asad, the critic of Western materialism, stood accused of succumbing to it; Asad, who first sought answers in Islam, now was suspected of questioning it. The disappointment Asad had come to feel for the actual practitioners of Islam had become mutual.

Translator of the Qur'an

Asad relocated to Geneva with Pola Hamida. There he began to contemplate a new project, ambitious in scope and significance: a new English translation of the Qur'an. Asad had not been satisfied with Marmaduke Pickthall's widely used translation, since Pickthall's knowledge of Arabic had been "limited." As Asad later wrote:

"Familiarity with the bedouin speech of Central and Eastern Arabia — in addition, of course, to academic knowledge of classical Arabic — is the only way for a non-Arab of our time to achieve an intimate understanding of the diction of the Qur'an. And because none of the scholars who have previously translated the Qur'an into European languages has ever fulfilled this prerequisite, their translations have remained but distant, and faulty, echoes of its meaning and spirit."²

¹ Maududi (Lahore) to Margaret Marcus [Maryam Jameelah], 25 February 1961, in Maryam Jameelah, *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (Delhi: Crescent Publishing, 1969), 15.

² *The Message of the Qur'an*, Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), iv-v.

Asad began work on the translation in 1960. Such a large-scale project required the support of a patron, and he eventually appeared in the form of Saudi Arabia's King Faysal (r. 1964-75). Asad had known Faysal since 1927. He reestablished a link in 1951, when he paid his first visit to Saudi Arabia in eighteen years, and he nurtured the tie as Faysal began his ascent to the throne. Asad became one of Faysal's most fervent enthusiasts, seeing in him a vast improvement over Ibn Saud. "Whenever I reflect on the manner in which King Faysal rules over his realm," wrote Asad, "it appears to me as the fulfilment of every promise which the life of his father had held out and left open."¹ Still, Faysal was a dutiful son, and this praise could not cancel out Asad's stinging indictment of Ibn Saud, made in *The Road to Mecca*. As it happened, however, this obstacle was not insurmountable: in later editions of the book, Asad completely excised his enumeration of Ibn Saud's failings, replacing them with a few pages of banal ruminations on the desert.²

Faysal renewed Asad's Saudi patronage. In 1963, Faysal had the Muslim World League in Mecca subscribe in advance to Asad's planned translation, which he began to compile in Switzerland. Asad published a limited edition of the first nine surahs in 1964. At about that time, he moved to Tangier, settling in a comfortable villa surrounded by cypress trees and bougainvillaea, where he worked to complete the translation. In 1980, he published the full translation and commentary in Gibraltar, under the title *The Message of the Qur'an*.

Asad's translation opened with this dedication: "For people who think." The spirit of the translation is resolutely modernist, and Asad expressed his profound debt to the reformist commentator Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). As another convert later wrote: "In its intellectual engagement with the text and in the intimate, subtle and profound understanding of the pure classical Arabic of the Koran, Asad's interpretation is of a power and intelligence without rival in English."³ There are many English-speaking Muslims who will attest to the appeal of this translation, and who rely upon it daily.

But the translation created a controversy among some Muslim clerics who disputed Asad's modernist and allegorical interpretations of some verses. Critics accused him of denying the existence of angels, the

¹ From the 1973 postscript to the 4th rev. ed. of *The Road to Mecca* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus), 378.

² Cf. 177-81 of the original 1954 ed. with 177-81 of the 4th rev. ed. of 1980.

³ Parker, "Death of a Muslim Mentor," 28-29.

permissibility of concubinage, and the bodily ascent of Jesus to heaven.¹ In private, there were those who insinuated that the translation reintroduced *isra'iliyyāt*, "Jewish distortions" akin to those allegedly introduced by the first Jewish converts to Islam. In 1974, even before the translation was published in full, it was banned in Saudi Arabia.² Asad was left to finish the work on his own, supported financially by his friends. Fortunately, Asad had many, including Shaykh Ahmad Zaki al-Yamāni (b. 1930), the Saudi minister of oil and natural resources and "my brother-in-spirit," to whom Asad devoted a collection of his essays a few years later.³

The rejection of his translation was only one sign of the growing climate of intolerance that further disillusioned Asad. "Khomeini is worse than the Shah," he told journalists after the Iranian revolution. "He has nothing in common with Islam."⁴ According to another journalist, Asad took a dim view of fundamentalist chaos, the intolerance of extremists, and the pater about "Islamic science" and "Islamic education." The Muslims, he opined, had been "low down for so many centuries that now they think they have to assert themselves by saying we are different. They are human beings. They are not different." In particular, he championed the rights of women and opposed the fundamentalist campaign for the *hijāb*. "Many people think that if you put a veil over a woman's face and cover her, that is the way to Islam. It is not. In the time of the Prophet Muhammad, no *hijāb* existed except for the Prophet's wives and it is a wrong inference to say that this holds good for all Muslim women."⁵

His own early indictment of the West, *Islam at the Crossroads*, which found such an echo among fundamentalists, he himself came to regard as a "harsh book." Likewise, the once-powerful romance of the Arabs no longer held him in its grip. In 1981, he told a journalist that "it is possible that if I would come into contact with Arabs today for the first time, I would no longer be attracted by them."⁶ Asad still remained

¹ Asad dealt with all these accusations in *Arabia; The Islamic World Review* (October 1981), 4.

² Reinhard Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 334 n. 59.

³ Asad, *This Law of Ours*, dedication page.

⁴ Quoted by Lisbeth Rocher and Fatima Cherqaoui, *D'une foi l'autre: Les conversions à l'Islam en Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 64.

⁵ Mushtak Parker, "Death of a Muslim Mentor."

⁶ Malise Ruthven, "Muhammad Asad, Ambassador of Islam," *Arabia: The Islamic*

enamored of Islam. Yet this ideal Islam was nowhere to be found in existing Islam, and could just as well be practised in Europe. It is said that Pakistan's president from 1978, General Zia ul-Haq (1924-88) tried to persuade Asad to return to Pakistan, but without result. In 1982, Asad left Tangier for Sintra, outside of Lisbon. He later moved to Mijas on the Costa del Sol in southern Spain. He remained articulate and lucid in interviews given as late as 1988.¹ In these last years, he reportedly began work on a sequel to *The Road to Mecca*, tentatively entitled *Homecoming of the Heart*. The title is said to have alluded to his contemplated return to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of Prince Salman (b. 1936), governor of Riyadh and one of Ibn Saud's sons. It is not clear whether such a return was a realistic prospect, or whether the title hinted at a more spiritual homecoming. For Asad had neither completed this work nor returned to Arabia when he died on 20 February 1992, at the age of 91. He was buried in the small Muslim cemetery in Granada.²

“Struck no Root”

Few in the Muslim world took notice of Asad's passing. He had argued for a rational Islam; he had sought to reconcile Islamic teachings and democracy; he had tried to make the Qur'an speak to modern minds. His project, in fact, encapsulated ideals that drove the reform of Judaism, which by his parents' generation had largely served to ease Jews out of their faith altogether. Islam provided the last chance to achieve that ideal — the reform of a religion of law so that it could be made to live in a modern age, as a liberal force of continuing faith.

Unlike so many other Western converts to Islam, Asad chose also to live in Muslim societies, and worked to give Islam direction. But by advocating this reform, Asad remained a foreign body in contemporary Islam, a transplant rejected time and again by his hosts. Saudi Arabia declined to keep him as a journalist; Pakistan, which he served as an official and diplomat, also broke with him; and the self-appointed guardians of Muslim orthodoxy shunned him as a Qur'an translator and commentator. Paradoxically, Asad won genuine acclaim in the West. There he found minds open to his ideas, and opportunities to

World Review (September 1981): 60, 62.

¹ See the video “A Tribute to Muhammad Asad,” filmed in 1988 and distributed by Islamic Publications International of Teaneck, New Jersey.

² Details on these last years are provided by Mushtak Parker, “Death of a Muslim Mentor.”

publish and lecture. And there he ultimately found refuge from the late twentieth-century reality of Islam.

Asad's road to Mecca was the shorter journey, made headlong in the enthusiasm of youth. His road from Mecca was the longer journey, made painstakingly in an awareness of the contradiction between the promise of Islam and its contemporary practice — and his own equivocal position in it. For all Asad's fervor and belief, his Muslim answer never satisfied his Jewish question, put most poignantly by Asad to Asad: "Why is it that, even after finding my place among the people who believe in the things I myself have come to believe, I have struck no root?"

(in: *The Jewish Discovery of Islam. Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*. Ed. By Martin Kramer. Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999, pp. 225-247).

Dr. Mohd. Iqbal, MA
M.A., No. 9, 1929
Rumreeh, Lahore

(138)

دکتر ۲۲ جولائی ۱۹۳۴ء

ڈیر نیازی صاحب

آج رسدہ دریاں تمام پورا گام گاہ پر۔ میں نے اپنے رسدہ میں
اگر دیکھا اگر رسدہ اور اس کے اندر دفینر کا کچھ
مج سے ہم شروع کیا ہے۔ یک چھ وقت رخصت کر رہا
اب انہما کے وقت میں ہوا میں رہتا ہے
میں آواز دیکھ رہا ہے کہ اگر کسی کو
مگر یہ میرا ایک ماہ کے اندر چند ہی گھنٹے میں
در رسدہ میں دفینر متوجہ ہلاک ہوں
تازہ خبرہ زلف برتا ہے ہر روز مٹان سے آجاتی ہے
اسے اپنے میں نہایت محکمہ ہاں رسدہ میں اس وقت
میں نے اسے زلف میں ہو گیا ہے مگر وہ آگت ہاں سے
سب سے ہونا اس کے اندر ہر وقت آتا ہے گنا
میں نے اسے کچھ ہاں میں رسدہ میں
میں نے اسے کچھ ہاں میں رسدہ میں
میں نے اسے کچھ ہاں میں رسدہ میں

Iqbal's letter to Nazir Niazi (22 July 1934), refers Islamia College Committee's final decision about Asad's appointment.

TOMAS GERHOLM

THREE EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS AS CONVERTS TO ISLAM: *CULTURAL MEDIATORS OR SOCIAL CRITICS?*

The number of Muslims in western Europe is steadily increasing. The major part of this growth can be understood as a simple consequence of international migration. For various reasons, people from the 'House of Islam' arrive here bringing their religious baggage. Numerically much less significant — but for a student of culture perhaps more interesting — are the Europeans who adopt the religion of the immigrants. In the well-known manner of converts, they often become more royalistic than the king. But it also happens that they bring an inquisitive mind to their new religion interpreting it in new ways. Thus they may contribute to the continuous evolution of Islam helping to mould it to fit the conditions of contemporary European society. Will they also help us, who are not Muslims, to understand Islam better? Will they have an impact on the development of Islam in its countries of origin? These are the questions to which I hope to suggest answers, by considering the cases of three European intellectuals who have embraced Islam. They are the Swedish painter Ivan Aguéli (1869-1917), the Polish-Jewish journalist Leopold Weiss (1900-), and the French philosopher and politician Roger Garaudy (1913-). Conversion to Islam is thus not only a recent phenomenon. I have avoided a concentration on the present because it easily deviates into sensationalism and makes such conversion look like little more than one of the transient fads and foibles of the day, thereby perhaps overshadowing the points of theoretical interest. It is, of course, debatable how representative these cases are. Still, they raise questions that might be pursued in further research.

* Muhammad Asad is one of these European intellectuals, but the whole article has been included on account of its rarity and thematic significance—
Chaghatai.

After discussing the personal background to their conversion, as described by themselves, I move on to features of Islam that were of central importance to these men and which make their choice, in retrospect at least, seem logical. I also discuss how they understand the concept of conversion as applied to their own cases. Leaving their own motives aside, I suggest some conditions for successful conversions, that is not only having a conversion experience but being able to maintain a new religious belief. Finally, I examine their activities as Muslims and try to show that as Westerners they seem to be condemned to carry on a dialogue with their original cultural heritage, never really — except perhaps in one case — becoming integral parts of their adopted religious tradition. I begin, however, with a brief review of the social phenomenon of recent European conversion to Islam.

No one knows how many Muslim converts there are in Western Europe, but it is probably safe to say that they constitute a larger category than most people realize. Let us take France for example. France has a total Muslim population of approximately 2 or perhaps close to 3 million. Islam is thus the second biggest religion in France, even if one were to regard Protestantism as a religion on its own. The estimates of the number of converts range from approximately 50,000¹ to at least 200,000² according to official Muslim spokesmen in Paris. Even the lower of these figures is a significant number, and it is steadily growing.

Both journalists and researchers are paying more and more attention to this phenomenon. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, in its edition for 7-13 February 1986, carried a dossier on Islam in France dealing mainly with the Islam of the immigrants but also devoting a couple of pages to that of the converts. Some illustrious names are mentioned: Maurice Béjart, the choreographer (who has told the story of his conversion to Shi'a Islam in his autobiography, *Un instant dans la vie d'autrui*, published in 1979); Michel Chodkiewicz, director of the publishing house Editions du Seuil, for three decades a follower of the Sufi tradition within Islam, translator of and commentator on two of its masters: Ibn al-'Arabi and Abd al-Qadir; Roger Garaudy, for many years a leading figure within the French Communist Party and a prolific writer on philosophical themes.

¹ A. Krieger-Krynicky: *Les musulmans en France: religion et culture*. Paris: Maisonneuve 1985, p. 135; F. Lamand: *L'Islam en France: les musulmans dans la communauté nationale*. Paris: Albin Michael, 1986, p. 29.

² L. Rocher and F. Cherqaoui: *D'une foi l'autre: les conversions à l'islam en Occident*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, p. 7.

As is evident both from the material in *Le Nouvel Observateur* and, especially, from a recent book,¹ the conversions are not at all limited to intellectual circles. Islam recruits new believers from all levels of society and for various reasons, pragmatic as well as spiritual ones, of course. Among the intellectuals, not only in France but also in Switzerland and England, the encounter with the writings of René Guénon — a major French metaphysician, savant of many religions and towards the end of his life a Muslim, living in Cairo until his death in 1951 — has often been of crucial importance.

In Great Britain there are a number of intellectuals who have embraced Islam, most frequently in its Sufi form. Names such as James Dickie, Gai Eaton, and Martin Lings could be mentioned. The first and the last of these are prominent scholars of Islam, while Gai Eaton is a writer (see, for instance, his book *Islam and the Destiny of Man* published in 1985) associated with the Islamic Cultural Centre in London. On a more popular level one finds Sufi brotherhoods attracting many young people, often with a background in left-wing politics.²

This political background is even more obvious in the case of the Muslim community in Spanish Granada. In the one-time Arab quarters of Albaicin, overlooking Alhambra, a group of 700 young Muslim converts have gathered to form an almost self-sufficient community dedicated to the 'return of Islam to Andalusia'. The majority of these converts seem to consist of former left-wing activists, and their version of Islam has quite a political ring.³

Whereas Switzerland has been the home of a number of European Sufis — Frithjof Schuon and Titus Burckhardt, to mention only the best known — West German converts seem to favour a more orthodox type of Islam.⁴ In Denmark, there is an active group of followers of al-Ahmadiyya. Not much is known about the Muslim sector in the Swedish community, except that it is growing. A few authors — among them Gunnar Ekelöf, perhaps the greatest Swedish poet of this century — have taken an interest in Sufism without ever entering a *tariqa*, a Sufi brotherhood. A new phenomenon that has attracted much attention in the media is a small number of converts to orthodox Islam. Swedish women appearing in traditional Islamic garb and a Swedish man entering a Saudi competition in Qur'an recital: this is something quite

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

different from a bookish interest in Sufism that may not have any public consequences. Some sources claim that Stockholm has nearly a thousand converts, but this figure is probably much too high.

From Ivan Aguéli to Abdul Hadi al-Maghrabi

Ivan Aguéli has belatedly become recognized as one of the forerunners of modernism in Swedish art, inspired by Cézanne and Gauguin. His paintings were produced mainly during two periods of his life, in 1890-95 and in 1911-17. The sixteen 'empty' years in the middle of his life were the years of his most intense activities as an anarchist, anti-vivisectionist and religious seeker.

Aguéli was born in 1869 in the small Swedish town of Sala and he died forty-eight years later in Barcelona, run over by a train. Most of his life was spent abroad, Paris being the centre to which he always returned after shorter or longer journeys to Egypt and India. When he first arrived in Paris in 1890 on a Swedish grant for painters, he was already deep into religious studies. To this was added the Anarchist sympathies of the intellectuals with whom he associated in Paris, so that he soon described himself as a 'Swedenborgian Anarchist'.¹ In 1894 he was arrested for complicity in an Anarchist conspiracy. He spent several months in prison awaiting trial, 'le procès des trente', in which he was finally acquitted but some of the others were given sentences of up to twenty years. Aguéli's letters from the Mazas prison to a Finnish friend in Paris indicate that this was the time when he began gravitating towards Islam. Upon his release he left France for a first visit to Egypt which did not last more than a few months. Back in Paris he continued his religious studies. His formal conversion did not take place until a few years later, probably in 1898. In early 1899 he departed for India in order to study "the impact of Islam on other races than the Arab one" (letter to his beloved Marie Huot, a poetess and a dedicated anti-vivisectionist, in Gauffin 2:61). He was very impressed with what he found, summing it up (with some self-irony) in the same letter: "As you see, I have become a fanatic Muslim . . ."²

Madame Huot, whose jealousy knew no bounds, forced him to come back to Europe both by cutting his financial supplies and by letting him know that the French were about to introduce bullfighting:

¹ A. Gauffin: *Ivan Aguéli: Människan, mystikern, målaren*. 2 vols., Stockholm, 1949-41.

² Gauffin, *op. cit.*, 2 : 62.

he was needed at home to help stop it. With mixed feelings Aguéli returned to Paris to do what he could to avert the threat. On June 4 1900, he and Madame Huot waited outside the bullring at Deuil for the corrida to begin. When the bullfighters' landau approached, Aguéli pulled a gun and fired two shots, missing the matador but injuring (lightly) the bandillero. On account of his 'idealism', he escaped any serious consequences of his action.

The following year, in 1901, he met a young Italian doctor, Enrico Insabato, who shared Aguéli's interest in the Islamic part of the world but perhaps more for political than for purely religious reasons. Together they worked out a plan to settle in Egypt in order to work for a *rapprochement* between what was best in East and West. A couple of years later they were both in Cairo, and on 22 May 1904 the first issue of a weekly newspaper, *Il Convito/An-Nadi*, was published. It was bilingual, each issue having both an Italian and an Arabic section which did not completely mirror each other. Aguéli seems to have done most of the editorial work. He was also a frequent contributor to both the Italian and the Arabic parts using one or the other of his two pseudonyms, 'Abdul Hādi al-Maghrabi', his real name as a Muslim, and, less modestly, 'Dante'.

The first issue carried an editorial statement signed by Enrico Insabato but in all probability it was the work of both men. The purpose of the newspaper was to work towards an alliance of the good forces in both 'Arabia' and Europe. True progress in the East would only be possible if the Muslims were able to revert to the Islamic sources of their civilization and to refrain from slavishly aping the West.

"Thus I am determined to let Europe know the true Islam and to try with all my might to prevent a new kind of Crusade, whereof certain fanatics are dreaming. On the other hand, I wish, in the interest of all civilization, that Islam be pure and strong. I am also determined to let the Muslims know the real Europe, the great qualities of which no one would dispute. (*Il Convito*, 22 May 1904, p. 1).

By "the true Islam" Insabato probably means Sufism, for this was a topic that his collaborator Abdul Hadi was going to devote himself to in many articles. Besides religious themes in a narrow sense, the paper was also concerned with the great political questions of the day arguing for a greater role for Italy in the Arab world. The implicit

criticism of British rule in Egypt earned *Il Convito* both friends and foes. Single issues of the paper found its way to many corners of the Arab world, including Yemen, and contributed to the goodwill which Italy enjoyed in many Arab quarters. The real ruler of Egypt at this time, Lord Cromer, was not amused, if one is to believe Aguéli's letters which make many hints at the difficulties created by the British authorities. After a few years *Il Convito* was forced to cease publication. In 1909, Ivan Aguéli returned to Paris and Marie Huot. He continued to publish articles in the French press under his Muslim name, and it was through his mediation that René Guénon, in 1912, was initiated into a Sufi order.¹ Aguéli's return to Paris coincided with his return to painting. But that is another story.

From Leopold Weiss to Muhammad Asad

Leopold Weiss was born in 1900. His family lived in the Polish city of Lwów, then part of the Austrian Empire. In deference to a family line of rabbis, his parents — although not themselves religious in any deeper sense than by habit — gave Leopold a solid Jewish education that seemed to destine him for a rabbinical career. But quite early he began to turn away from Judaism:

“In spite of all this budding religious wisdom, or maybe because of it, I soon developed a supercilious feeling toward many of the premises of the Jewish faith. To be sure, I did not disagree with the teaching of moral righteousness so strongly emphasized throughout the Jewish scriptures, nor with the sublime God-consciousness of the Hebrew Prophets — but it seemed to me that the God of the Old Testament and the Talmud was unduly concerned with the ritual by means of which his worshippers were supposed to worship Him. It also occurred to me that this God was strangely preoccupied with the destinies of one particular nation, the Hebrews. The very build-up of the Old Testament as a history of the descendants of Abraham tended to make God appear not as the creator and sustainer of all mankind but, rather as a tribal deity adjusting all creation to the requirements of a ‘chosen people’...”²

¹ J. P. Laurant: *René Guénon*, Paris: L'Herne, 1985, p. 18.

² Muhammad Asad: *The Road to Mecca*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980, pp. 55-56.

Leopold drifted into a "matter-of-fact rejection of all institutional religion" (*ibid.*: 56). After World War I, he took up studies of philosophy and history of art at the university of Vienna, but without great energy. He wanted to become a writer and this wish led to his first break with his family. Lean years followed in Berlin where he tried to establish himself as a freelance writer, had some success as an assistant to the film director F. W. Murnau, and finally entered the newspaper world as a reporter.

In 1922, a close relative invited him to Jerusalem. He went by way of Alexandria, the Nile Delta, across the Suez Canal and Sinai to Palestine and Jerusalem. His very first encounter with Arabs made a deep impression on him and to this was added many experiences during his subsequent stay in Jerusalem. During this time he began writing occasional articles for the prestigious (but desperately poor) *Frankfurter Zeitung*. This was the beginning of a career as that newspaper's special Middle Eastern correspondent that was to last several years and then lead on to a similar position at the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and other papers.

Weiss travelled extensively in the Middle East, studied its history and its present situation, and felt both attracted by the central features of the Islamic way of life, as he understood it, and repelled by what he perceived as the continuous loss of faith and growing infatuation with the West. It was during a heated discussion of this theme with a provincial governor in Afghanistan that the latter suddenly said: "But you are a Muslim . . . only you don't know it yourself."¹ Eight months later, in 1926, when Weiss was back in Berlin and newly married, he converted formally to Islam. The decisive event was an experience that he felt proved beyond doubt that the Qur'an was not just a book written by a wise man but really the word of God. His wife converted shortly after, and they set out on their first pilgrimage to Mecca.

Only a few days after their arrival in Mecca, Elsa Weiss died from an unusual tropical disease. Leopold stayed on in the country and gradually established close links with members of the royal family, especially Prince Feisal but also the king himself, Ibn Saud.

From then on, Leopold Weiss or Muhammad Asad, as he is now known, associated himself with several attempts to further the cause of Islam by trying to establish the social and political conditions for a truly Muslim life. High hopes were pinned on Saudi Arabia, but

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

Asad was ultimately disillusioned. He also looked, for a time, towards the Sanusiyya in Libya. But it was the creation of Pakistan as an Islamic state that more than anything else provided him with a possibility to devote himself to this task. In 1952 he even became Pakistan's ambassador to the UN. Still, his greatest contribution to the cause of Islam may very well have been books such as the already mentioned autobiography, *The Road to Mecca* (1980, first edition 1954), and *Islam at the Crossroads* (1982, first edition 1934), to name only two of them. After a long life outside of Europe, he now lives in Portugal.

From Roger Garaudy to Raja Garoudi

In the present generation, Roger Garaudy is, no doubt, *le doyen des convertis célèbres*.¹ He was born in Marseille in 1913 and was a leading member of the French Communist Party for more than two decades. In 1945 he became a member of the Central Committee and in 1956 he entered the Polit-bureau, where he remained for twelve years. He was also a member of parliament for almost two decades. From the early 1950s onwards — until the rise of Louis Althusser in the middle of the 1960s — he was the leading ideological spokesman of the party. After criticizing the attitude of the French Communist leadership for being silently supportive of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, he was excluded, to begin with, from the Central Committee at the beginning of 1970 and, a few months later, from the party itself.

Garaudy was the main defender of Marxist orthodoxy in the debates on existentialism raging in France after the end of World War II. After Stalin's death in 1953, Garaudy began to take a more positive attitude to existentialism when he viewed it in the light of the early humanistic writings of Marx. These were beginning to be more widely known outside specialist circles at approximately the same time. In several books from the late 1950s, especially *Perspectives de l'homme*,² he develops a kind of Marxist humanism open to a dialogue not only with existentialism but also with phenomenology and neo-Thomist personalism. This new ecumenical attitude led, in the 1960s, to a special exchange of views with Catholic intellectuals, for example in *De l'anathème au dialogue*.³

¹ Rocher and Cherqaoui, op. cit., p. 191.

² *Perspectives de l'homme: existentialisme, pensée catholique marxisme*. Paris: Gallimard 1959.

³ *De l'anathème au dialogue*. Paris: Pion, 1965.

After the break with the Communist Party, his intellectual home for three decades, Garaudy intensified his 'dialogues' with other ideological currents. In a series of works, *Paroles d'homme*¹, *Le projet espérance*², *Pour un dialogue des civilisations*³ — with the significant subtitle: *L'Occident est un accident* — and *Appel aux vivants*,⁴ Garaudy develops the theme that western civilization has become a destructive machine annihilating the contributions of other civilizations to the human project and in the course of this process also losing sight of its own contribution. By using the collective experience of mankind, Garaudy hopes to launch a 'planetary' attempt to create new relations between man and nature, man and society, man and the divine.

Then, in 1981, Garaudy both presented his candidacy for the French presidency and took the step of converting to Islam. This new phase of his development was manifested in books like *Promesses de l'Islam*,⁵ *L'Islam habite notre avenir*,⁶ and *Biographie du XXe siècle*⁷ with the subtitle: *Le testament philosophique de Roger Garaudy*.

Since his conversion, Garaudy has been a celebrated guest in many Islamic countries. He was invited to give a speech on the millennial anniversary, in 1983, of the founding of al-Azhar, the foremost university in the Islamic world (although there were also indignant reactions against his unorthodox views). Less grandiose, perhaps, but equally significant was the selection of him to give the main speech at the conference of European Muslims (i.e. mainly converts) in Granada in 1985.

The Reasons for Conversion

Looking now at the reasons given by our three converts for their conversion, one finds many common themes but also quite different accents. Let us return to the already quoted letter by Abdul Hadi to Madame Huot.

¹ *Paroles d'homme*, Paris: Laffont, 1975.

² *Le projet espérance*. Paris: Laffont, 1976.

³ *Pour un dialogue des civilisations: l'occident est un accident*. Paris: Denoël, 1977.

⁴ *Appel aux vivants*, Paris: Seuil, 1979.

⁵ *Promesses de l'Islam*. Paris: Seuil, 1980.

⁶ *L'Islam habite notre avenir*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1981.

⁷ *Biographie du XXe siècle: le testament philosophique de Roger Garaudy*. Paris: Tougui, 1985.

“I have been once to their mosque [that of the Tamils] and I realized that these men have much to teach me. In their presence I feel how my tenseness subsides, how my anxiety and violent impulses are soothed. These expressions of peace, serenity and openness we have never encountered in Europe. One must be a rigid ‘intellectuel’ not to be healed among these men. . .

The foundation of Islam is very beautiful. It is neither a religion nor a civilization like the others. It is a state of mind that, one day, I wish to analyze. This state of mind has created a set of ceremonies, customs, manners and preferences that in the beginning seem arbitrary, childish, lacking in order, but that actually, if one studies their psychology, their causes, their origin, their hidden meaning, appear as evolutionary phases, consequences and expressions of the same mentality.”¹

Something similar to what Aguél² experienced is also what Asad comes back to, time and again, in his *The Road to Mecca*. Islam is present in every gesture, and every gesture is a sign of something that he feels modern European man has lost. But Asad has also recourse to something else, and that is a sort of rational argument which is very characteristic of contemporary apologetics on behalf of Islam:

“It not only teaches us that all life is essentially a unity — because it proceeds from the Divine Oneness — but it shows us also the practical way how every one of us can reproduce, within the limits of his individual, earthly life, the unity of Idea and Action both in his existence and in his consciousness. To attain that supreme goal of life man is, in Islam, not compelled to renounce the world; no austerities are required to open a secret door to spiritual purification; no pressure is exerted upon the mind to believe incomprehensible dogmas in order that salvation be secured. Such demands are utterly foreign to Islam: for it is neither a mystical doctrine nor a philosophy. It is simply a programme of life in accord with the ‘laws of nature’ which God has decreed upon His creation; and its supreme achievement is a complete coordination of the spiritual and the material aspects of human existence. In the teachings of Islam,

¹ Gauffin, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

both these aspects are not only 'reconciled' to each other in the sense of leaving no inherent conflict between the bodily and the moral existence of man, but the fact of their existence and actual inseparability is *insisted* upon as the natural basis of life."¹

Garaudy also touches upon this theme of the equilibrium, harmony and unity of Islam in many passages of his many books, for instance in this one: "[I]t would be contrary to Islam, the religion of 'unity' to dissociate contemplation action, interior from exterior" (Garaudy 1981a: 47). But the main theme in Garaudy's argument is different:

"For three centuries the Occident has rejected this third heritage: the Arab-Islamic heritage which could have and still cannot only reconcile it with the other wisdoms of the Earth, but also help it to become conscious of the human and the divine dimensions from which it has severed itself by realizing one-sidedly its will to power over nature and over man. For Islam . . . has not only integrated, fertilized and spread the oldest and the highest cultures — those of China and India, of Persia and Greece, of Alexandria and Byzantium — from the Chinese Sea to the Atlantic. To disintegrated empires and dying civilizations it has also brought the spirit of a new collective life. Islam has given men and their societies their truly human and divine dimensions of transcendence and community. And on the foundation of this simple and strong faith there has flourished a renewal of the sciences and the arts, of prophetic wisdom and law. The first renaissance of the Occident took place in Muslim Spain four centuries before that in Italy. It could be a universal renaissance."²

With Aguéli it is the experience of the Islamic way of life that seems to be the main motivating force. This is also very powerful in the case of Muhammad Asad, but he adds a rational and almost profane argument for Islam based on its alleged congruity with Nature. Finally, in the case of Garaudy, it is obvious that he has found in Islam a model for the kind of synthesizing dialogue that he has been engaging in for

¹ Muhammad Asad: *Islam at the Crossroads*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus 1982 (1934), pp. 17-18.

² Garaudy (1981), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

thirty years.

Garaudy's image of Islam as model for a possible synthesis of previous civilizations is very much in accordance with the Islamic image of itself as a synthesis and correction of the previously revealed religions. This claim is one of the great strengths of Islam in its encounter with both Judaism and Christianity: the latter two are in a sense contained and superseded by the former. In the case of Christianity, one might venture the hypothesis that the longstanding aversion for Islam — not to say hatred of it — has something to do with the feeling that Islam has done symbolic violence to the Christian faith by appropriating *parts* of it into its own dogma (just like Christianity itself did with Judaism). To the medieval mind the Islamic conquest of the Holy City must have been a fitting symbol of this state of affairs.

A Convert's Image of Western Civilization

A common thread running through the three men's verdict on western civilization is its allegedly one-sided materialism. Western civilization is viewed as a partial development of man's potential resources, whereas — in principle, if not in fact — Islam offers a more harmonious unfolding of the inherent possibilities of life. According to this view of the matter, Islam represents the synthesizing movement of the human spirit while Christianity and the civilization to which it has given rise stand for an aberration leading to an overdevelopment of the material side of life and a corresponding underdevelopment of the spiritual side. Many converts, not only the three I have selected here for special scrutiny, have felt the appeal of precisely this synthesizing movement of the third great 'Abrahamic' religion.

If one tries to view the matter as a detached observer (to the extent that this is at all possible), it may strike one that today western civilization is actually much more of a synthesis than present-day Islam. Returning to the golden age of Islamic civilization, when the heritage of the Greeks was salvaged and being added to, Islamic civilization played a role that in some ways reminds us of the present situation in Europe and the United States — cultures which, among many other things, also are museums of other civilizations. It is here that the various other civilizations of the planet receive some kind of hearing and where they can always expect to find an audience, even if marginal. It is here that there will always be a minority of enthusiasts ready to plead their cause. Few other civilizations have taken such an interest, and such a

hermeneutic interest at that, in other civilizations as western civilization has done. Or, to bring men back in, few, if any, other civilizations have had so many individuals so inclined to try to understand a foreign system of ethics and practices as in the case with Western civilization. This attitude has been wedded to a position of strength, no doubt about that, and a conviction of the ultimate superiority of western culture. It is this situation of an expanding centre drawing into its orbit a culturally heterogeneous periphery that has created the structural foundation for a category of intellectuals, in both centre and periphery, criticizing and opposing the dominant culture. In this way Europe and the United States have become societies where an unprecedentedly large proportion of their intellectual elites are questioning the very basis of their own societies.

The Meaning of 'Conversion'

So far I have spoken as if 'conversion' were an unproblematic concept. It is not. Rocher and Cherqaoui¹ quote an interview with Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, an intimate savant of the Sufi tradition: "One does not convert to Islam. One embraces a religion that contains all the others." On the strength of their many interviews, they observe that the majority of the European converts "question strongly the term 'conversion': this transition is experienced as a continuity, a growth, a fulfilment. . ."² This is also how at least two of our three converts seem to look at their own lives. For Aguéli, Swedenborg remains a constant reference and in his letters he often praises the Muslims for practising the Christian virtues more faithfully than the Christians themselves do. And Garaudy (1985: 265) goes to great lengths in defending himself against the suspicion that he has made a sharp bend on his road through life:

"The vocation of all my life was to seek the point where the act of artistic creation, the political act and the act of faith were one and the same. I have found, in Islam, a faith that is at the same time a religion of beauty and an ethics for action. I have entered into its fold without rejecting anything of what Jesus had brought into my life . . ., nor of what Marxism had taught me about analysis of society and effective action in society . . . Islam

¹ Rocher and Cherqaoui, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

does not appear in my life as a rupture, but as a fulfilment.”

Muhammad Asad's case is more ambiguous:

“Sometimes it seems to me that I can almost see the lives of two men when I look back at my life. But, come to think of it, are those two parts of my life really so different from one another — or was there perhaps, beneath all the outward differences of form and direction, always a unity of feeling and a purpose common to both?”¹

Muhammad Asad shows us in this passage what we already know, namely that each life, each autobiography as well as each biography, is a reconstructed life. With a little extra effort, Asad would probably have been able to show the logic behind the transformation of Leopold Weiss into Muhammad Asad: *plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose*. The past exists for the sake² of the present. All three authors invent a past that is compatible with their present lives. Two of them invent a continuity while the third holds the possibility open, at least, that a sharp break has occurred.

There may be a sociological reason for this difference. Aguéli and Garaudy have continued to live among people who knew them from the time before the great change. They still have a need to explain themselves, whereas Muhammad Asad alone broke radically with his past spending half a lifetime outside of Europe among the people of his adopted faith. It is, perhaps, symptomatic that Ivan Aguéli never became Abdul Hadi but for special purposes and that Roger Garaudy will never be Raja Garoudi except under very particular circumstances. Leopold Weiss, on the other hand, effectively became Muhammad Asad. These speculations lead us on to another aspect of conversion.

The Social Basis of Conversion

It is tempting to seek sociological explanations of the conversions of Aguéli, Weiss and Garaudy. Not that the stated reasons for their conversions are not, on one level, quite enough. But even if one is not trying to explain away a sincerely felt religious conviction, the social scientist will always be interested in looking for the social

¹ Asad: *The Road to Mecca*, op. cit., p. 46.

conditions of a successfully maintained religious conviction. It is one thing to adopt and hold a belief privately, another one to maintain it publicly. As Berger and Luckmann¹ have said: "To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously: to retain a sense of its plausibility."

The converts we are dealing with here have certainly faced an uncomprehending, if not openly hostile, audience. Making one's newly acquired religious conviction known to persons to whom one is bound by multiple ties requires both courage and a certain recklessness. It also exposes one to sanctions of various sorts. Rocher and Cherqaoui found a couple of examples of converts who had felt they must keep their new faith secret, in order not to hurt a close relative. Extrapolating from this evidence, one can easily imagine a situation in which the final step of conversion is never taken because of the repercussions it might have among people who are important to one. In other words, those who are most likely to move from religious convictions held in private to religious affirmations made in public are those who need not worry particularly over the impact that their conversion might have on their 'significant others'.

This argument has a respectable pedigree in the social sciences. Durkheim, in his *Le Suicide*,² was making a similar point: suicide rates varied between populations in such a way that groups in which the individual was less securely bound to others 'produced' higher rates than those groups in which the individual was tied to other people by many and multi-stranded ties. Durkheim made little of the personal motives of the suicide candidate and concentrated instead on the factors impinging on the likelihood that a wish to take one's life would actually be carried out. By the same token, it may be the degree of social embeddedness that decides the likelihood of a successfully maintained conversion. The similarity actually goes further, since, from the point of view of those around him, the convert is undergoing a kind of 'social death', in a sense taking his or her own life. Leopold Weiss is a case in point. His father considered him dead when he learned of his conversion.

Seen from this perspective, what do the lives of Aguéli, Weiss and Garaudy tell us? The picture is not conclusive but perhaps worth contemplating.

Ivan Aguéli had broken with his father but was close to his

¹ P. Berger and T. Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1967, p. 158.

² E. Durkheim: *Le Suicide: étude de sociologie*. Paris: Alcan 1897.

mother, as is witnessed by his letters and the money she continually sent him. His relations to the Swedish community of painters in Paris were often strained, but he also had several devoted friends on whom he made severe demands. He was apparently well received by influential French painters and he was also accepted into Anarchist circles. In the early 1890s he was both painting and pursuing his religious and political studies. *Le procès des trente* and his subsequent months in prison changed the situation somewhat and probably radicalized his religious search which continued during his first travel to Egypt. He became a Muslim in Paris, apparently without making a great affair of his conversion. It was in India, where he was a stranger to all, that he first faced the public and was easily accepted as a Muslim.

There are elements of a 'Durkheimian' isolation and marginality here, but altogether Aguéli seems to have been part of the Parisian Bohemia, more or less integrated into it, more or less following its rules. Although the letters from the prison indicate that the decisive step may have been taken in his cell, Aguéli is not an utterly isolated person. It may be more fruitful, in his case, to look at the figure of the artist in the public imagination of his times. This was very much the epoch of the romantic artist, the visionary, who was expected to be slightly bizarre and even an outrage to the bourgeois customers who in buying his paintings also bought the sensations and the scandals. In other words, there may have been great tolerance of Aguéli's ideas in the circles in which he moved and perhaps even a kind of incitement for him to seek the different and the new.

Leopold Weiss, on the other hand, fits very well into the frame of the convert who is maximally free of old ties and then integrates himself more and more deeply into a new network. He broke with his father at an early age, he joined a metropolitan group of would-be writers and journalists, he finally became a foreign correspondent in the Middle East who for practical reasons had very little contact with his old Central European friends but who, instead, developed his links with people from the host societies ever more. When his formal conversion finally came, he had already become part of a new network of significant others. The trajectory of Leopold Weiss becoming Muhammad Asad is an exemplary conversion — exemplary in Durkheimian terms — in that the social foundation of his old religious outlook is being undermined, partly by his own willing, partly by the force of circumstance, long before his conversion. The social base of his new religious conviction is firmly established, this also long before the conviction itself is there.

When it comes to Roger Garaudy, one enters the area of pure speculation since, as far as I know, there is very little autobiographical material available. Garaudy is a prolific author, but his writings are impersonal and rhetorical. Still, the outer ramifications of his story are telling in themselves. After many, many years as a leading member of the French Communist Party, Garaudy is expelled, first from the Central Committee and then from the party itself. Although this development had been foreshadowed for some time, it was a very radical break in his life. Durkheim would have a strong case for regarding Garaudy, at this stage, as maximally vulnerable both to social death and some kind of 'resurrection'. One could possibly argue that ever since his serious problems within the Communist Party began, Garaudy has been carrying on 'dialogues' with traditions, religions and civilizations rather than with concrete persons. This must be a state of maximal liminality, to speak with Victor Turner (1969), a state of flux and indeterminacy, which is another way of understanding Garaudy's permanent personal revolution.

Cultural Mediation or Cultural Criticism?

In a very general sense the heroes of this story are all cultural mediators. None of them is satisfied with just practising his new faith, he also wants to explain it to others, to bridge the gulf between himself and them. This is done, however, in rather different ways and with varying degrees of success.

Muhammad Asad, alias Leopold Weiss, is the best example of a convert who could be labelled a successful cultural mediator. In his first book as a Muslim, *Islam at the Crossroads* (1982, first published in 1934), he is addressing his fellow Muslims and trying to influence them both in their faith and in their attitude to western civilization. On both matters he stays very close to the line of Islamic orthodoxy, and he does not for a second pretend that he has always been a Muslim. In his second and widely read book, *The Road to Mecca* (1980, first published in 1954) he is now turning to a western audience and trying to explain not only how Leopold Weiss could become Muhammad Asad but also what Islam looks like from the inside.

Aguéli's work for *Il Convito* is also a work of mediation. The Orient is explained to the Occident and *vice versa*. But to the extent that this mediation is successful, it is the result of a pretended identity. In both the Arabic and the Italian text, Aguéli appears under his Muslim

name, Abdul Hadi al-Maghrabi. In the Italian articles, signed by Abdul Hadi and in the editorial comments sometimes introducing them, there is never any mention of the fact that the author is a European-turned Muslim. For the work he wanted to accomplish, it was necessary to appear as an enlightened 'native*' in the eyes of the European readers, and not as a renegade. The name Abdul Hadi made him an authentic Muslim, and his views showed how worthy of respect these Muslims really were. For Abdul Hadi appeared as an internal critic of contemporary Islam propagating a return to what he considered to be the essence of that faith. To, his Arab readers, on the other hand, the name Abdul Hadi was a sign, just as important that he was a fellow believer and not a foreigner trying to interfere with the religion of Islam.

The complex situation of the European convert to Islam — trying to address a message both to his culture of departure and his culture of arrival — emerges perhaps most clearly in the case of Roger Garaudy. In his case nothing could be gained by his appearing under another name (although, as we know, he has such a name). For Muslims in the Islamic world, it is important that Garaudy stays Garaudy so that he can be described as 'the greatest philosopher in Europe' (as I heard him presented in Yemeni mountain villages in 1982) or as 'the greatest Occidental philosopher of the XXth century' (as he was presented at the millennial anniversary of al-Azhar (*Le Monde* 24 March 1983) while simultaneously announcing that he is a convert to Islam. There is an interesting process of legitimation going on here. Since western culture — in spite of everything that is being held against it — carries high prestige even in the Muslim world, the fact that a leading spokesman for it turns to Islam is a sign of the innate superiority of that faith. (The process is similar to all the attempts to 'prove' the Qur'an by showing how well it accords with the latest findings of science.) But while Garaudy can be used — and is used — for this purpose, it is not possible for him to intervene in internal Islamic matters. His cultural capital as a master-thinker of western civilization can only be used for legitimizing Islam in general. Were he to propagate his own version of Islam among Muslims who were born as such, it is likely that his origin — including his previous conversions — would be held against him. This is not only a hypothesis, this is actually what occurred at the celebration of al-Azhar's first millennium.

These cases have been picked at random. Obviously, no conclusion could be drawn on the basis that two of them, Aguéli and Garaudy, demonstrate the difficulties for converts trying to play the role

of mediators between the two cultures they know so well, while only one of them. Asad, testifies to the possibility of such a venture. Still, the two problematic cases point to general circumstances that could be of decisive importance also for others attempting cultural mediation of the same kind. The general relations of forces between western societies and the countries of the Muslim world is such that at least eminent intellectuals of Garaudy's type are likely to end up in the same dilemma. They will be used for legitimizing Islam in the eyes of those Muslims who are at all in need of some kind of legitimation. It is also likely that the form of Islam they will thus support, perhaps in spite of themselves, will be of a mainstream, orthodox kind. This is certainly the misgiving of many reform-minded Muslims living in Europe. In their eyes, European converts to Islam are serving the interests of the conservatives in the Muslim world. Their fears seem to be born out by the case of Garaudy.

But if these intellectual converts threaten to be used as a support for conservatism in the 'East', they may very well become the allies of a liberal, tolerant attitude in the 'West'. It is here that their criticism of western society and their description of the essence of Islam can have a positive effect. Western culture has a special and almost revered niche reserved for its critics. Many of them — in the tradition of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* — have used fictions or real (but idealized) countries, in order to make their critical points. It is perhaps in this light that we should view the efforts of both Aguéli and Garaudy. Muhammad Asad, on the other hand, has proved that it is not altogether impossible to raise a reasonable voice that is listened to on both sides. The explanation of this feat could be that Muhammad Asad, aside from his personal qualities, has always been a spokesman for Muslim orthodoxy, not a radical protagonist of Sufism like Aguéli or of an ecumenical vision like Garaudy. Cultural mediation works best in the middle of the field.

(in: *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*. Edited by Tomas Gerholm and Yngve Georg Lithmann, London: Mansell, 1990 (paperback), pp. 263-277).

Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal, Kt
A.S. No. 9, 1934
Ministry of Education

Lahore

Dated _____ 193

(140)

بہتر خدایا...
 تو دنیا میں بہتر...
 ایک وقت سر اسد...
 ہزار آواز پر...
 جہاں سے...
 میری...
 پتا ہے اللہ...
 اس دنیا میں...
 کہ وہ...
 اب نہ...
 جس پر...
 کہ ہم...
 نام...

Handwritten notes in Urdu script, likely a response or commentary on the main text, written in a cursive style.

Iqbal's letter to Nazir Niazi (28 July 1934) concerning Asad's appointment in the Islamia College (Lahore)

MARCIA K. HERMANSEN

THE ROAD TO MECCA

The Road to Mecca of Muhammad Asad (1900-1992)¹ is the most famous conversion account by a European Muslim. While not a pilgrimage narrative *per se*, its charm lies in the rich and evocative description of Arabian life. Among the early writers, Asad has the most to say about spirituality and this may help explain the persistent appeal of his work; "it is not even a story of a deliberate search for faith—for that faith came upon me, over the years, without any endeavor on my part to find it. My story is simply that of a European's discovery of Islam and of his integration within the Muslim community."²

Asad's account has a certain complexity in that he is writing about events of the 1920s and 1930s from the political and intellectual perspectives of the early 1950s. He thus sounds a new note which increasingly defines the position of Muslims, indigenous and by choice. This is the political and cultural conflict between the West and Islam. In his introduction Asad sets up this opposition through recounting his analysis in terms of a discussion he has with a sympathetic and sophisticated Western colleague to whom he explains the psychological roots of this conflict in "subconscious" European memories of the Crusades, as an event which traumatized the emergent psyche of young European civilization.³ This oppositional relationship, in turn, explains the persistent hostility of the West to Islam and things Islamic. This element of Asad's narrative places him in between, as it were, the earlier and later phases of pilgrimage conversion accounts since he identifies himself as split from the West in a way not possible for earlier converts.

Asad anticipates the contemporary discourse against

¹ Asad is also the first Western Muslim to participate in internal Muslim discourse about Islam through his translations. Yvonne Haddad notes the influence of his writings on conservative Muslim intellectuals such as Sayyid Qutb.

² Asad, *Road to Mecca*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 3-8.

Eurocentrism,

“Ever since Greek and Roman times, European thinkers and historians have been prone to contemplate the history of the world from the standpoint and in terms of European history and western cultural experiences alone. Non-western civilizations enter the picture only in so far as their existence, or particular movements within them, have or had a direct influence on the destinies of Western man; and thus, in Western eyes, the history of the world and its various cultures amounts in the last resort to little more than an expanded history of the West.”¹

The book is structured around the motif of the author’s various journeys across Arabia and the Middle East culminating in his performance of *hajj* in 1927. In the course of the narrative Asad shifts topically and chronologically among his biography, his adventures in the Middle East, and reflections of Islam.

Asad grew up in a Jewish family in what is now Poland. He frequented the cafe society of Vienna as a youth and talked himself into a career as a journalist.² At age twenty-two he went to Jerusalem to visit a relative.³ From this time he begins to make unfavorable comparisons between European civilization and the East. In Jerusalem he contrasts the European Jews who are “out of all harmony with the picture that surrounds them” with the Sephardim who are more like Arabs.⁴ On his trips back to Europe he increasingly becomes aware of the ugliness of peoples’ expressions.⁵ A repeated motif is his disapproval of the Western (Christian inspired) separation of spirit and flesh.⁶ He further is oppressed by the arrogance and emptiness of the modern condition which he interprets as the “*Dajjāl*” or anti-Christ figure predicted in the

¹ Asad, p. 3.

² Asad’s background and youth is briefly compared to that of Theodor Herzl by Pierre Assouline, *Les Nouveaux Convertis* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982), 180.

³ His pre-conversion book about this period is *Unromantisches Morgenland* (Frankfurt, 1924).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 92, 308-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-78, 100, 136. He also mentions this theme in *Islam at the Crossroads* (Lahore: Ashraf, 1947), 15.

Islamic *hadith*.¹

Asad is again theoretically prescient in characterising himself as "belated."² In a remarkable passage he philosophizes about the position of a Westerner encountering his true self in the Orient. His view of the shift from the intangible possibilities pursued by "discoverer-adventurers or creative artists" --is that they were seeking "the innermost springs of their own lives." "We late-comers are also seeking our own lives—but we are obsessed by the desire to secure our own life before it unfolds itself." By entering "the tremendous strangeness of another world" the European experiences the dangerous difference which may ultimately lead to greater self-knowledge.

The challenge presented by Asad is that of grasping, comprehending and communicating with the other. He poses the rhetorical question, "Is this possible or desirable?"

His response is that this is possible if one is willing to exchange familiar habits of thought for new, unfamiliar ones. In an earlier passage he wrote, "For when I ask myself, 'What is the sum total of my life?' something in me seems to answer, 'You have set out to exchange one world for another—to gain a new world for yourself in exchange for an old one which you can never really possess.' And I know with startling clarity that such an undertaking might indeed take an entire lifetime."³

Asad's resolution to the dilemma of otherness is to attribute the sense of cultural exclusion to an error peculiar to Western ways of thinking—"we are wont to underestimate the creative value of the unfamiliar and are always tempted to do violence to it, to appropriate it, to take it over, on our own terms, into our own intellectual environment."⁴ He proposes that "cultural difference can, and should, be overcome by means other than intellectual rape: it might perhaps be overcome by surrendering our senses to it."⁵

Asad's conclusion is that the juxtaposition of the familiar and the strange awakens one to the intangible realities of their own life, "to become aware of the strangeness of the world around you and thereby

¹ *Ibid.*, 293, 295. The Dajjāl is mentioned in a number of *hadith* reports as a feature of the trials which will emerge as the end of the world approaches.

² For a discussion of the theory of belatedness see Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Critical Dissolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 143-44.

⁵ *Ibid.*

to reawaken your own, personal, forgotten reality..."¹

A third theme in Asad's narrative is the decay of Muslim societies, which he does not blame on the West *per se*, but rather seems to attribute to a loss of faith and authenticity,² for after all, "It was not the Muslims that had made Islam great, it was Islam that had made the Muslims great."³ A number of his comments on this account are reminiscent of Muhammad Iqbal, whom he cites as a colleague in the introduction. "After leaving Arabia I went to India and there met the great Muslim poet-philosopher and spiritual father of the Pakistan idea, Muhammad Iqbal. It was he who soon persuaded me to give up my plans of traveling to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and to remain in India to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state which was then hardly more than a dream in Iqbal's visionary mind."⁴ In fact, the tenor of Asad's Islamic writings, for example, his translation of the Qur'an, is clearly that of an Islamic Modernist.⁵

(in: *The Muslim World*, lxxxix/i (January 1999), pp. 60-63, art. "Roads to Mecca: Conversion Narratives of European and Euro-American Muslims" by Marcia K. Hermansen, pp. 56-89.)

¹ *Ibid.* In several places Asad mentions a youthful interest in psycho-analysis. This is evident in a number of his formulations, although in this case one might rather detect a Jungian influence in his thought.

² *Ibid.*, 189-93, 282.

³ *Ibid.*, 193, 283.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁵ Note that his teacher in Egypt, Mustafā al-Marāghī, is described as a follower of Al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, p. 188. Among Asad's Islamic works are *Islam at the Crossroads* (Delhi: Arafat, 1934), *Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1961), *This Law of Ours* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1987), *Sahih Bukhārī* (partial translation) (Lahore: Arafat, 1938), *The Message of the Qur'an* (trans. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1987).

KHALED AHMED

MUHAMMAD ASAD: THE ROAD BEYOND MECCA

Muhammad Asad (1900-1992) is known in Pakistan for writing his inspirational autobiography *The Road to Mecca* in 1954 that told the story about how a Jew converted to Islam and found peace in it. In the fifties, Islam had not yet turned hard and Asad's story did not raise any hackles. But by the time he completed his English translation of the Qur'an, the yardsticks had changed and it was difficult to find any defenders of his interpretive method. Because he had been a friend of King Sa'ūd, the Saudi government continued to help him. When no one bought his Qur'an (because it did not meet the current scholarly 'consensus') the Saudi Oil Minister Sheikh Zaki Yamāni bought 20,000 copies of it. Asad's Qur'an had been sponsored by Muslim World League headed by Sheikh Muhammad Surūr, member of a leading family of Kuwait, but when the League distributed its copies to its scholar members, a furore of disagreement arose about its deviation from the 'consensus'.

A Meeting in Lisbon

I met Muhammad Asad in 1987 through the courtesy of our ambassador to Portugal, Birjis Hasan Khan, in Lisbon, where Asad was living with his Bostonian wife, Pola Hamida. I asked him about General Zia's enforcement of the *shari'ah* in Pakistan. He was clearly in disagreement over the orthodox 'extrapolation' from the Qur'an of half a witness for the woman in the law of evidence promulgated by Zia. He was appalled by the Zina Ordinance and thought that no Muslim in his right mind could equate rape with fornication, as done by the Muslim jurists. He clearly did not accept the *taqleedi* jurisprudence of Islam and insisted that the Qur'an should be understood as it was before it was overtaken by the laws and tenets of later ages. He was a purist who disliked the political accretions of later times and did not take easily to

hadith. His was an austere vision, much like the Saudi version of Islam.

He told me that when he converted to Islam he simply translated his name Leopold into Arabic. Leo became Asad, but what inspired him with awe was what happened after he was guided by his mentors to go and learn the Qur'an in Lahore after the Second World War. (He had been interned during the war in Dalhousie). He joined the Ahl-e Hadith seminary at Sheranwala Gate. He was struck by the fact that the locality was named after 'lions' that decorated the Gate under which the seminary was located. I asked him about Saint-John Philby (famous spy Kim Philby's father), the other friend of Ibn Sa'ūd, who in many ways was a precursor of Asad himself: an expert in Arabic and a relentless explorer of the Arabian desert. His expression of dislike was immediate. Philby's knowledge of Arabic was such that he often contested the meaning of some words with the Arabs. Asad's own grasp was tremendous, which enabled him to challenge some of the meanings accepted by Imam Bukhāri in his collection of *hadith*. But Asad did not think that Philby was a believer, nor did he trust the loyalty he showed to Ibn Sa'ūd. Asad's travels took him to all parts of the Islamic world before he settled down to his job in new-born Pakistan.

At a Lahore Seminary

At the Sheranwala Gate mosque, he learned the Qur'an from Maulana Ahmad 'Ali (d.1962), the greatest Ahl-e Hadith scholar of the city, with strong ties to the anti-British luminaries of Deoband, including Maulana 'Ubaidullah Sindhi who, like Ahmad Ali's father, had converted from Sikhism. Muhammad Asad also mentioned with extreme reverence the name of Maulana 'Abdul Qādir Kasūri (d.1942) whom he met frequently while he was in Lahore. Abdullah Malik, in his book on the family of Maulana 'Abdul Qādir Kasūri, explains the spiritual connection the Kasuris had with the Ahl-e Hadith, the 'non-imitative' school of thought closest to the Wahhābi version of Saudi Arabia. He also reports on the offer Ibn Sa'ūd had made to Maulana 'Abdul Qādir of a ministership or advisoryship in Hejaz, which the *maulana* had declined. The Kasūris became well-known lawyers in undivided India, based on the remarkable success of Maulana 'Abdul Qādir in the legal profession. His son, Mian Mahmood 'Ali Kasūri became an internationally known defender of human rights and was a member of the PPP government in 1971 before falling out with prime minister Bhutto. His son, Mian Khursheed Mahmood Kasūri, a lawyer, was an MNA of the Muslim

League before the parliament was dissolved in 1999.

Allama Javed Ahmad Ghāmidī's journal *Renaissance* in its May 2002 issue has reproduced an article on Muhammad Asad from *The Impact International* which tells the story of this extraordinary man who served Islam in general and served Pakistan in particular in its early days. Leopold Weiss was born in a Polish town called Lwów (Lyon, again) from where he escaped when 14 and joined Austrian army under a false name. He was recovered by his father and brought to Vienna where he finally went to the university to study art and philosophy. But his dabbling mind was attracted to journalism, which he wanted to pursue in Prague. He was trained in the Jewish lore and knew his Mishna and Talmud in the footsteps of his grandfather who had been a rabbi in Czernovitz. A natural polyglot, Leopold could read and speak Hebrew and was acquainted with Aramaic too. Shifting to Berlin, Leopold entered the cinema for a time before landing a job as a journalist with a news agency. It was in Berlin in 1922 that he was invited by his maternal uncle to visit him in Jerusalem where he was in charge of a mental asylum.

An Eccentric Beginning

While in Jerusalem he was able to land the job of a reporter for the German newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*. He travelled frequently to Cairo, 'Ammān, Damascus, Istanbul and Lebanon, seeing how the Arab world lived. When he returned in 1924, his paper employed him on a regular basis and got him to write a book on his experiences in the Middle East. The book did not sell because it was not sufficiently romanticised and because it was anti-Zionist. Leopold simply did not accept that the 'Jewish homeland' was justified after driving the majority population of the Arabs from Palestine. The newspaper sent him back to the Middle East. On the way he stopped in Cairo to learn Arabic, in the process getting to know Sheikh Mustafā al-Marāghī, a renowned scholar of Islam who later arose to become the rector of Al-Azhar University. He embarked on his wanderings soon after that, going to Iraq and Iran, and finally to Afghanistan, where a Pushtun told him that he was already a Muslim because of his knowledge of Islam. After two years of wandering and writing for *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he returned to Berlin via Central Asia and Moscow.

By this time he was feeling attracted to Islam because of its lack of dichotomy between the physical and spiritual worlds. He married

Elsa in 1926 and embraced Islam together with her in the tutelage of an Indian Muslim in Berlin, renaming himself Muhammad Asad. He was contracted by a number of German Dutch papers before he left again for the Middle East. This time he stationed himself in Saudi Arabia, meeting King 'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn Sa'ūd in 1927. At the age of 32, after Elsa died, he took an Arab wife and immersed himself in a library of early Islamic sources while also taking time out to ride through the length and breadth of the great Saudi desert, somewhat like Saint-John Philby. He travelled eastwards to Indonesia and India where he soon met Allama Iqbal who persuaded him in 1932 to 'elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state'. While in India, he was trapped by the outbreak of the Second World War. The Raj government interned him in Dalhousie for the duration of the war. After 1947, Asad started working as the head of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction in Lahore under the Punjab government, translating the *hadith* collection of Imam Bukhāri and publishing his journal, *Arafat*.

In the Service of Pakistan

In 1952, he was chosen to represent Pakistan at the United Nations as minister plenipotentiary, but while in New York he soon developed differences with the Foreign Office back in Pakistan. When he applied to marry an American convert to Islam, Pola Hamida, permission was refused, compelling him to resign. Somehow he put Pakistan behind him forever, never writing the sequel to his famous *The Road to Mecca* which told the story of his life up to his stay in Saudi Arabia. His translation of the Qur'an was typically based on early sources and not on the *tafseer* literature which had proliferated in the medieval centuries. Although he had fled Western rationalism to become a Muslim, he could not avoid applying rationality to the understanding of the Scripture. He was influenced by the Egyptian Muslim reformers, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Riḍā, whose rational presentation of Islam was later dubbed apologetics by the rising tide of *taqleedi* thinking. He wrote: 'The Qur'an cannot be understood if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and meaning'.

Asad remained ever a restless soul, travelling and staying in different parts of the world, in all spending about 19 years in Morocco alone, before finally settling in Spain, where he died on 20 February 1992, and was buried in Granada, Andalusia. His book *Islam at the*

Crossroads (1934) advising Muslims to stay away from blind Westernisation was translated into many languages, and his *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (1987) explained his approach to the *shari'ah* and bemoaned the tendency of the Muslims to accept local accretions to the purity of Islamic law. If the early 20th century reformers thought that Islam would move towards rationality and modernity, they were proved wrong towards the end of the century. Intellectual activity, which could have shown the way forward, has been suppressed by a rising tide of violence. As he sat before me in Lisbon, he clearly understood that he had been rendered irrelevant by the march of events. Today, the extremism embraced by the '*ulama*' threatens to destabilise the Islamic state, and the moderate view of scholars like Allama Javed Ahmad Ghāmīdi is easily set aside by the more powerful but less learned religious leaders of Pakistan.

(in: *Friday Times* (Lahore, weekly), June 21-27, 2002, p. 10.)

PROFILE (ANONYMOUS)

FROM LEOPOLD WEISS TO MUHAMMAD ASAD

**A Long and Romantic Journey, across three Continents
and two Cultures**

Writer, traveller and explorer, Muhammad Asad had a truly chequered life spanning three continents and two cultures. Born Leopold Weiss in the summer of 1900 in the Polish city of Lwów, then under Austrian empire, he was 14 when he escaped school and joined the Austrian army under a false name, only to be recovered by his father and taken home, now in Vienna. But about four years later when he was drafted in the army, he had ceased to have any longing for a military career. He was lucky. The Austrian Empire collapsed a few weeks after and he went on to study history of art and philosophy at the University of Vienna.

His father wanted him to take a Ph.D. degree. Leopold wanted to try his hand at journalism and 'one summer day in 1920' he 'boarded the train for Prague'. In doing so he had followed in the footsteps of his own father and a great-great-uncle.

One of his great-great-uncles had been a rabbi. One day, he left home, shaved off his beard and sidelocks and after drifting for a while, he arrived in Oxford. He graduated as a scholar, converted to Christianity, married a 'gentile' and sent a letter of divorce to his Jewish wife. The uncle became a distinguished astronomer and university don and given a British knighthood. In the family, however, his name was 'never mentioned aloud'. Nor does Asad himself record it.

Leopold's grandfather, an orthodox rabbi in Czernowitz, Bukovina, had wanted his father to follow the family's 'rabbinical tradition', but he chose to be a barrister. For Leopold, however, he made sure that 'by the age of 13', Leopold 'not only could read Hebrew

with great fluency, but also spoke it freely' and had 'a fair acquaintance with Aramaic'. The young boy 'studied the Old Testament in the original; the *Mishna* and *Gemara*—that is, the text and commentaries of the 'Talmud' and became immersed 'in the intricacies of Biblical exegesis, called *Targum*'.

From Prague Leopold went to Berlin, but there was no journalistic job for this total novice. The 'lucky break came' when the famous director, F. W. Murnau, took him as a temporary assistant for two months. The experience gave him self-confidence as well as opportunity to flirt with 'the leading lady of the film - a well-known and a very beautiful actress'. Next job was writing a film scenario along with a friend. In order to celebrate their 'entry into the world of films', they threw a party in a fashionable Berlin restaurant practically spending their entire earnings 'in Lobster, caviar and French wines'.

Another scenario job - a Balzac fantasy - and 'another full year of adventurous ups and downs in the various cities of Central Europe', Leopold succeeded 'at last in breaking into the world of journalism'. The United Telegraph press agency started by a Catholic politician in cooperation with the United Press of America took him as a telephonist - to relay the agency's news stories. He was promoted a journalist after he had 'made a first-class scoop' by snatching an interview with Madame Gorky.

Happy and vaguely alienated, 'one day in the spring of 1922', the young journalist received a letter that was to change the course of the following 70 years of his life. Uncle Dorian, his mother's youngest brother had invited him to Jerusalem, to live in his 'delightful old Arab stone house', alternately to read and to observe the 'quaint scenery around you'. Dorian headed a mental hospital in Jerusalem. 'He was not a Zionist himself ... nor, for that matter attracted to the Arabs'.

Like the 'average European', Asad had come to the Middle East with 'some romantic and erroneous notions' about Arabs. He had never thought of Palestine 'as an Arab land', though it did not take him long to realise that 'The Jews were not coming to it as one returns to one's homeland; they were rather bent on *making* it into a homeland conceived on European patterns and European aims'. He asked Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist movement and the future president of Israel: 'How can you ever hope to make Palestine your homeland in the face of the vehement opposition of the Arabs who, after all, are in the majority in this country?' 'We expect they won't be in a majority after a few years', 'Weizmann answered drily'.

But neither Dorian nor Jerusalem could stop Leopold from his wanderings. He became a correspondent for *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Sometimes in Cairo, sometimes in 'Ammān, back to Jerusalem; and on the road again to Syria (which then included Lebanon as well) and Turkey. It was a moment at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus that he 'became aware how near their God and their faith were to these people'.

End of 1923 saw him back in Vienna, reconciling with his father and reporting to his editor-in-chief Dr Heinrich Simon. Leopold Weiss had established himself as a writer on Arab and Middle Eastern affairs and *Frankfurter Zeitung* was now willing to remunerate him properly and keen that he returned to the area as soon as he had finished the book he had contracted to write.

He finished the book, *Unromantisches Morgenland*, and in Spring 1924, he was off again to the Middle East. The book did not sell well. It saw the Middle East in its 'day-by-day realities', and not as an exotic or romantic Orient. It was also 'anti-Zionist'. However, crossing the Mediterranean, Leopold's first stop was at Cairo where he tried to learn Arabic and spend some time with Shaikh Mustafā al-Marāghī. He wanted 'to gain a fuller picture of Islam'. Mustafā al-Marāghī subsequently became the Shaikh of Al-Azhar.

Early summer 1924, the special correspondent was on the move again. To 'Ammān, to Damascus, Tripoli and Aleppo, to Baghdad and to the Kurdish mountains, to 'that strangest of all lands, Iran', and to 'the wild mountains and steppes of Afghanistan'.

Islam had been revealing itself to Leopold in 'bits and pieces', but it was on a winter day in Afghanistan that a man, fixing an iron shoe to his horse, told him, 'But thou art a Muslim, only thou dost not know it thyself.' 'Why don't you say now and here, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Prophet" and become a Muslim in fact, as you already are in your heart', said the horseshoe-smith. 'I will go with you tomorrow to Kabul and take you to the *amir*, and he will receive you with open arms as one of us'.

But Leopold travelled on: from Kabul to Ghazni, Kandahar and Herat. Early 1926, he was homeward bound: via Merv, Samarkand, Bokhara and Tashkent and 'thence across the Turkoman steppes to Urals and Moscow'. Crossing the Polish frontier he arrived straight in Frankfurt. Next engagement was to deliver 'a series of lectures at the Academy of Geopolitics in Berlin.' He also married Elsa, 41 and a widow, whom he had met in Berlin during his previous visit. She had a nine-year old son.

His editor wanted him to write another book. He wanted to return 'to the Muslim world'. Leopold felt he 'was being driven to Islam'. He had been surprised 'to discover that the very aspect of Islam which had attracted me in the first instance - the absence of a division of reality into physical and spiritual compartments and the stress on reason as to why faith - appealed so little to intellectuals who otherwise were wont to claim for reason a dominant role in life'. Why?

'Because of Europe's long, almost exclusive association with Christianity, even the agnostic European had subconsciously learned to look upon all religious experience through the lens of Christian concepts, and would regard it as "valid" only if it was accompanied by a thrill of numinous awe before things hidden and beyond intellectual comprehension. Islam did not fulfill this requirement: it insisted on a coordination of the physical and spiritual aspects of life on a perfectly natural plane'.

Some time after September 1926, he sought out a Muslim friend of his, 'an Indian who was at that time head of the small Muslim community in Berlin, and told him that I wanted to embrace Islam'. Elsa followed a few weeks later. Leopold had become Asad, something which was strongly disapproved by his father and his sister. The relationship 'was resumed, in 1935', after his 'father had at last come to understand and appreciate the reasons for my conversion to Islam'.

Having earlier resigned from *Frankfurter Zeitung* and signed with *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of Zürich, the *Telegraaf* of Amsterdam and the *Kölnische Zeitung* of Cologne, Asad left Europe. Elsa accompanied him. The major part of the following years, 1927-1932, was spent in Arabia with missions in-between to Egypt and Cyrenaica (Libya) in support of the Sanusi *mujāhidin* who had been fighting a desperate guerrilla battle against the Italians.

For Asad, however, the Arabian years were, 'home-coming of the heart'. Early in 1927 he was received by King 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Sa'ūd. He was impressed by the King and the King took a great liking for this 'new Muslim' and he would send for him almost daily. Elsa died and Asad, now a little over 32, acquired an Arab wife, 'an infant son and a library full of books on early Islamic history'. But none of these prevented him either from wandering or marrying over and over again.

Asad rode and rode and explored the peninsula 'from the northern confines of Arabia towards the south' until 1932 when 'the dust of India . . . replaced the desert clear air of Arabia'. He had planned to move on, to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia, but the Islamic

poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal persuaded him 'to remain in India to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state'. Iqbal had presented the idea of Pakistan only two years earlier in 1930 and it was not before 1940 that Iqbal's idea was adopted as a political goal by the All India Muslim League. But to Asad Pakistan was 'a dream that demanded to be fulfilled'.

His first title on an Islamic theme, *Islam at the Crossroads*, published in 1934 proved to be extremely popular and was translated in several languages. *The Crossroads* was 'a plea to Muslims ... to avoid a blind imitation of Western social forms and values, and to try to preserve instead their Islamic heritage which once upon a time had been responsible for the glorious, many-sided historical phenomenon comprised in the term "Muslim civilisation".'

The outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939 saw Asad interned as an 'enemy alien' in the Punjab hill town of Dalhousie, and thus there is scant record of his work from 1935 till 1945 when he was freed from internment.

He then started a periodical, *Arafat*, which ceased after publishing about ten issues. Pakistan was achieved in 1947 and the Government of Punjab put Asad in charge of a newly established Department of Islamic Reconstruction in Lahore. He embarked on translating *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the famous *Hadith* collection and revived *Arafat*. Asad also contributed eloquently to the debate about Pakistan having an Islamic constitution. Two years later he was seconded to the Pakistan Foreign Service and made director of the Middle East Division in the foreign ministry.

Early 1952 Asad was sent to New York as Pakistan's minister plenipotentiary to the UN. But problems had begun to develop between Asad and the foreign ministry bureaucracy. Some people were perhaps jealous for their own petty reasons. Some were suspicious because of his religious and adventurous background. It is claimed that the government had received polite representations from a few friendly Arab states. Asad thought it was all a Qadiani mischief (Qadianis are followers of one Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, 1835-1908, who claimed to be a prophet etc. and because of this they are regarded as outside the pale of Islam). The Pakistan foreign ministry was then headed by a leading Qadiani, Sir Zafrulla Khan.

Matters, however, came to head when the ministry refused to give him permission to marry Pola Hamida, an American convert to Islam. Asad resigned toward the end of 1952 saying his private life was

more important to him and started to write the story of his wanderings and discovery of Islam. The story, *The Road to Mecca* (1954), covers the period before he had left Arabia for India. There are gaps but the story is fascinating and the style inimitable.

Asad had promised to narrate, perhaps at other time, the story of the years 'spent working for and in Pakistan'. It did not appear in his life time, but, it is reported, he had been working on the remaining part of his story.

Muhammad Asad had quit diplomacy but his intellectual exertions did not come to an end. Encouraged by Pola Hamida, supported morally and materially by the secretary general of the Muslim World League, the late Shaikh Muhammad Sarūr as-Sabbān and the Shaykh family of Kuwait, he embarked on rendering the Qur'an into English. The first volume of Asad's English rendering, from 'Al-Baqarah' to 'At-Tawbah', *The Message of the Qur'an* appeared in 1964. By far the most elegant and lucid of the English translations, Asad's rendering would have had a normal reception from critical to laudatory, but what made it draw a little different attention was its sponsorship by the Muslim World League.

The League had lent its name as a sponsor and had bought several thousand copies for distribution all over the world. Members of the League's Constituent Council, which included some very distinguished and independent Islamic scholars from the Muslim world, came to know of it only when they were presented their own copies. They assumed that the League had satisfied itself that the rendering was faithful and its explanations within the range of general consensus since it had been sponsored by a responsible Islamic body and, therefore, could not be seen as the work of an individual. No they had not, explained the secretary general. A committee of scholars appointed to review the work found it was too controversial to be distributed on behalf of the Muslim World League.

Asad had been greatly influenced by the liberal apologetics of the late 19th and early 20th century Muslim scholars, specially Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh and his disciple, Rashid Riḍā, who sought to find a version that they thought would be more easily acceptable to the so-called western mind. Asad was not just rendering the accepted meaning of the Qur'an into 'a really idiomatic' English, he was, in his view, trying 'to reproduce, as closely as possible, the sense which it had for the people who were as yet *unburdened with the conceptual images of later Islamic developments*'. The previous renderings, he said, suffered in many cases

from what he termed 'institutionalisation' of Islam 'into a definite set of laws, tenets and practises'.

'The Qur'an cannot be correctly understood', he wrote, 'if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and meaning'. That in fact was the whole stress in the vast body of existing *Tafsir* literature (renderings and explanations of the Qur'an) that took great care to reach and stick to the understanding of the original sources, the Messenger himself (peace be upon him), his companions, and those after them in the natural order of precedence. However, in his search for the 'original purport', Asad had allowed himself to be influenced by 'ideological developments' of his time.

Such 'developments' do not allow an easy comprehension of, for example, 'miracles', the historicity of Abraham passing the test of fire, the nightly journey and ascension to heaven (*Isra* and *Mir'aj*) by Muhammad (peace be upon him), the recalling of Jesus alive into Heaven, or even the Heaven (*Jannah*) itself etc. Asad is not alone in taking such a 'rationalistic' view while reading the Qur'an. What he seems to have done is to put together a number of individual 'rationalisations' under one cover.

Asad was dismayed but not discouraged. With the support of his other Arab benefactors, he went ahead with his work and in 1980 produced and published the complete edition of *The Message of the Qur'an*. Finding him in difficulty in distributing his work, the former Saudi oil minister, Shaikh Ahmad Zaki Yamāni bought 20,000 copies of the book.

The great strength of Asad's rendering, however, lies in its elegant and powerful prose, fluent and highly enjoyable. That is also its weakness, if and when, in the course of its long journey, the language happens to take a swing, the enchanted reader is unlikely to discern any gap between words and meaning. The Qur'an is both Style and Discipline, but Discipline cannot be separated from Style.

Asad's last book, *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*, was published in 1987 and he remained intellectually active until the last days of his life. Nor did he give up his taste for travel and migration, moving between East and West, North and South, yet spending a record 19 years in Tangier, Morocco, before moving finally to Mijas in the Andalusian province of Spain.

However as he travelled in time, his ideas and constructions were overtaken by intellectual and political developments in the Muslim world. Asad himself acknowledged the change in 1980 by adding a new 'Author's Note' and 12 footnotes to *Islam at the Crossroads*, published 46

years ago in 1934. Because, he wrote, some Muslim readers and leaders had 'failed to grasp the full implications of my call to cultural creativeness'. 'Alas', he said, the present re-awakening in the Muslim world 'is not a re-awakening to the true values of the Qur'an and Sunnah but rather a confusion resulting from the readiness of so many Muslims to accept blindly the social forms and thought processes evolved in the medieval Muslim world instead of boldly returning to the ideology apparent in the only true sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunnah'.

The reference to 'the medieval Muslim world' seemed to hark back to the orientalist comparison of Islam's Prime Age, the *Qarūn al-'ūla* with their own Dark Ages. But otherwise the remarks appeared to be too sweeping and too imprecise for, in fact, the present reawakening was a call for return to the Qur'an and Sunnah and that is what the Islamists the world over were accused of seeking as their goal. It seems when Asad called for a return 'to the ideology apparent in ... the Qur'an and Sunnah', he wanted the whole exercise to be undertaken virtually *de novo*, away from what he calls 'institutionalisation' of Islam 'into a definite set of laws, tenets and practise'. It is doubtful if that course would take one to the Qur'an and Sunnah as explained and exemplified by Muhammad (peace be upon him) and understood and practiced by his companions and Right-Guided Caliphs (may God be pleased with them).

There lay the gap between Asad's understanding of Islam and the popular Islam of an entirely new generation of young and enthusiastic Muslims owing no apology to the liberals and rationalists of the colonial era. Islam was challenging the rationality of the whole liberal secular construction and was being challenged in turn by the total might and power of its former colonial adversaries.

Leopold Weiss was born on 2 July 1900. Muhammad Asad died on 20 February 1992. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery in Granada, Andalusia.

(Profile, in: *Impact International*, vol. 22, nos. 7-8 (10 April-7 May 1992), pp. 34-36; also in: *Renaissance* (Lahore), May 2002, p. 14-22).

ḤASAN ZILLUR RAḤĪM

MUHAMMAD ASAD: VISIONARY ISLAMIC SCHOLAR

Muhammad Asad, writer, adventurer, diplomat, Muslim thinker par excellence, translator of the Qur'an, and author of one of the most remarkable spiritual autobiographies ever, *The Road to Mecca*, isn't as well recognized, even among Muslims, as he ought to be. It's a pity. Three years after his death in Spain in 1992, Asad remains virtually unknown in the West and an enigma to the average Muslim. Those who have followed his career through his books and writings, however, know that no one has contributed more in our times to the understanding of Islam and awakening of Muslims, or worked harder to build a bridge between the East and the West, than Muhammad Asad.

Asad was born Leopold Weiss on July 2, 1900 in Lwów, Galicia, now in Poland, and then part of the Austrian empire. In 1926, he converted to Islam and became Muhammad Asad. The story of the years before his conversion reflects the spiritual odyssey of a man in search of a home, a man struck by wanderlust, unable to quell his restless spirit until embracing Islam.

Asad ran away from home at 14 and joined the Austrian army to fight in the First World War. By 1922 he had become a foreign correspondent in the Near and Far East for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, then one of the most outstanding newspapers in Europe. His career in journalism took him to Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, and gave him a unique perspective on world affairs, particularly issues relating to Jews and Arabs.

While staying with his uncle in Jerusalem, he came into contact with the Zionist Committee of Action and was repelled by its contempt toward the Arabs. "Although of Jewish origin myself," wrote Asad in *The Road to Mecca*, "I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism... I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a great foreign power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of

attaining a majority in Palestine and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been....This attitude of mine was beyond the comprehension of practically all the Jews whom I came in contact with during those months. They could not understand what I saw in the Arabs....They were not in the least interested in what the Arabs thought; almost none of them took the pains to learn Arabic; and everyone accepted without question the dictum that Palestine was the rightful heritage of the Jews.”

It was here that Asad encountered Chaim Weizmann, the undisputed leader of the Zionist movement, and had a heated discussion with him regarding the Zionist philosophy. “What about the Arabs?” Asad asked as Dr. Weizmann was one day articulating his vision of a Jewish National Home.

“What about the Arabs?” echoed Dr. Weizmann.

“Well, how can you ever hope to make Palestine your homeland in the face of the vehement opposition of the Arabs who, after all, are in the majority in this country?”

The Zionist leader shrugged his shoulders and answered dryly: “We expect they won’t be in a majority after a few years.”

A Saddening Experience

Asad was overcome with sorrow as he reflected on this experience. “How was it possible, I wondered, for people endowed with so much creative intelligence as the Jews to think of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms alone?...Were they so hopelessly blind to the painful future which their policy must bring to the struggles and the bitterness to which the Jewish island would forever remain exposed in the midst of a hostile Arab sea? And how strange, I thought, that a nation which had suffered so many wrongs in the course of its long and sorrowful Diaspora was now in single-minded pursuit of its own goal, ready to inflict a grievous wrong on another nation. Such a phenomenon, I knew, was not unknown to history, but it made me, nonetheless, very sad to see it enacted before my eyes.”

Traveling extensively throughout the Muslim world, Asad’s interest in Islam deepened. At the same time, he began to examine critically the decay he found among Muslims. Arabia was bogged down in tribal warfare; foreign powers were conquering Muslim lands with the help of Muslim puppets; most Muslims were mired in the lowlands of self-righteousness, wallowing in intellectual stagnation by blindly

imitating the West.

To understand how Muslims could regenerate themselves, Asad took a characteristic approach he immersed himself in understanding the source of Islam, the Qur'an. Embarking on an intensive study of classical Arabic, he began at the same time living among the bedouin of Central and Eastern Arabia whose speech and linguistic associations had essentially remained unchanged since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when the Qur'an was being revealed. It gave him insight into the semantics of the Qur'anic language unknown to any Westerner and enabled him later to translate the Qur'an into English as *The Message of the Qur'an*. Along with his commentary, *The Message* is without parallel in conveying the holy book's meaning and spirit to non-Arab readers.

Muslim Renaissance became Asad's Goal in Life

In his study of the Qur'an, Asad found that Islam gave "Yes to action, No to passivity. Yes to Life and No to asceticism." In its pages, he found an intense God-consciousness that made no division between body and soul or faith and reason, but consisted of a harmonious interplay of spiritual need and social demand. "It was obvious to me that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own failure to live up to it...It was not Muslims that had made Islam great: it was Islam that had made the Muslims great. But as soon as their faith became habit and ceased to be a program of life, to be consciously pursued, the creative impulse that underlay their civilization waned and gradually gave way to indolence, sterility and cultural decay." From that point on, Muslim renaissance became Asad's goal in life.

He traveled far and wide, conferred with kings, leaders and the common man "between the Libyan Desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian Sea," and began putting his ideas on paper. *Islam at the Crossroads*, first published in 1934, still stuns the contemporary reader with its analysis of Muslim regression and its bold prescription for instilling self-assurance to an Islamic world suffering from lack of confidence under the onslaught of Western technology.

But dark clouds had been gathering over the horizon of Europe. (It was only in the late 1940s that Asad discovered his parents had died in a Nazi concentration camp.) When World War II broke out, Asad was in India where he befriended Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual father

of the idea of a separate Pakistan. Iqbal persuaded Asad to abandon plans to travel to eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and "to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state."

Asad was interned in India at the end of the war. When Pakistan was born in 1947, Asad was appointed its undersecretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs and became its permanent representative to the United Nations in 1952. Here he met his wife, Pola Hamida, a Bostonian, whom he married the same year. It was also here that he began writing his incomparable *The Road to Mecca* (1954), covering the first half of his life, including his conversion to Islam in 1926 and his "homecoming of the heart, as I began to understand it during those distant days in the late summer of 1932."

After two years in New York, the Asads traveled extensively before returning to Pakistan in 1955. But the couple's restless spirit spurred them on, first to Morocco, then to Tangiers, then to Portugal, and finally to Spain. In the *Principles of State and Government in Islam*, published in 1961, Asad laid down in unambiguous terms the foundation of an Islamic state on the basis of Qur'anic injunctions and the Prophet's sayings. Briefly, the two defining limits are that in an Islamic state true sovereignty lies with God and that believers must conduct all businesses pertaining to the state and community through mutual consultation. Within this framework, Asad showed that an Islamic state had the flexibility to contain features of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, including the American institutions of presidency and the Supreme Court.

The author hoped with this book to contribute "toward a better understanding of Islamic ideology by the non-Muslim West—an understanding so vitally needed in our time." Considering the dark and extreme pictures orientalist and "Islamic experts" like Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Steven Emerson and others paint about Islam and Islamic states, Asad's book should be required reading for these "experts" from academe and the media.

The Message of the Qur'an was published in 1980. Asad meant to devote two years to completing the translation and the commentary but ended up spending 17. He dedicated the *Message* to "people who think" The importance of using one's own faculties to understand Divine text (*ijtihad*), a fact emphasized in the Qur'an itself, was a theme Asad returned to again and again.

Without *ijtihad*, Asad was convinced Muslims would find it difficult, if not impossible, to practice true Islam in their lives, and that

they would become intellectual prisoners of others who were themselves prisoners of the past and had little to contribute to the resurgence of Islam in the modern world. It was only through *ijtihad*, he felt, that Muslims could grow, change and develop in accordance with the needs of the time and the growth of man's experience, while always remaining true to the Qur'an and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This was not to deny the importance of religious scholars, only that Muslims were obligated to understand their faith as best as they could using their own God-given faculties, before seeking help to enlarge their understanding. "Every Muslim ought to be able to say 'The Qur'an has been revealed for me'," he said in an interview a few years before his death. He was fond of quoting the Prophet. "If you use your reason and turn out to be wrong, God will still reward you. And if you are right, you will be doubly rewarded."

Timeliness and Timelessness

In 1987, Asad published *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*, a collection of articles on Muslim religious and political thought he had written over the years but had not published, including "Answers of Islam," "Calling All Muslims," and "A Vision of Jerusalem." In fact, it was his wife, Pola Hamida, who recovered them after going through some of his old papers and, recognizing their importance, insisted that they be published. "I believe the reader will be struck, as I have been," she wrote in the foreword to the book, "not only by the extraordinary timeliness and the timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their consistency."

I had the good fortune of corresponding with Muhammad Asad. In 1986,¹ I read *The Road to Mecca* and was so moved and persuaded by the author's narrative that I resolved to somehow make contact. (The only other book to have similar impact on me, albeit from a different perspective, was the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.) Soon I came across an interview with Asad in a magazine called *Arabia*, published out of England. I wrote a letter to the editor of *Arabia* to forward to Asad. To my amazement, Asad soon replied from Spain. "I was deeply touched by your letter," he wrote, "which was forwarded to me by Dr. Fathi Osman. Thank you for your appreciation of my work; it is for people like you that I am writing." In my letter I had expressed the hope that he would continue his life story from where he left off in *The Road to Mecca*. "I have promised my wife, who has been insisting for a long time," he

replied, "that I should continue and complete my memoirs. My next work will be just that and of course it will, of necessity, include my years in India and Pakistan...Please pray that God will allow me to accomplish this work." Our correspondence continued for a while until Asad became too ill to reply.

After Asad died in Spain in 1992, I wrote to Pola Hamida Asad, who informed me that the sequel to *The Road to Mecca* was only partially completed by Asad—part one—and that she herself would complete part two. It would be called *Homecoming of the Heart*, "a title which he himself suggested." (The book is not yet available in the United States.)

Muhammad Asad stood alone among contemporary Muslims for his extraordinary perception of, and contributions to, Islam. With his command of the English language, his knowledge of the Bible and biblical sources, as well as Jewish history and civilization, Asad was more successful than most in communicating to Muslim and non-Muslim readers the essence of Islam in both its historical and timeless context.

But beyond words and books, Asad wanted to see the living body of Islam flourish in the modern world. Although distressed by the sad state of the Muslim world and its reactive agenda, he remained optimistic to the end that a new generation of Muslims eventually would rise to make his dream a reality.

It is easy to imagine Asad approving of the peaceful yet vigorous activism of American Muslims in defending the tenets of their faith and in striving to bring a balance to American society. He would, in particular, have invested high hopes on Muslim youth for their idealism and their ability and eagerness to think and reason. Asad abhorred extremism in all its forms. "*And thus We have willed you to be a community of the Middle Way*" was a Qur'anic verse he quoted often, explaining that in Islam, there was no room for revolution, only evolution.

Asad was the conscience of thinking Muslims. "The door of *ijtihad* will always remain open," he used to say, "because no one has the authority to close it." As Islam enters the most critical phase of its development in the West, Muhammad Asad's legacy assumes an urgency no thinking Muslim can afford to ignore.

(in: *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, September 1995, pp. 45-46; also in: *IQRA* (San Jose), April 1998, pp. 25-27)

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

A FORGOTTEN PAKISTANI

It was a cold and cloudy day of April 2000. I had walked up the long road that goes to the fabulous Al-Hamrah. High above the historic city of Granada, is a small Muslim cemetery.

I had gone there to pay homage to a Pakistani whose hundredth birthday will not be celebrated in Pakistan on July 2 this year. His name was Muhammad Asad. He had come to the Indian subcontinent in 1932 with plans to travel to Central Asia but he was persuaded by Iqbal to stay in India and take part in the struggle for independence.

Near the farthest corner of the graveyard, I found the grave I was looking for. The grave stone read: Muhammad Asad: Born July 2, 1900, died February 21, 1992. The Qur'anic verses under the dates were from *suratul fajr* (the daybreak) which Asad had translated.

Born on July 2, 1900 in Lwów (Lemberg), then part of the Austrian empire but now in Poland, Asad was called Leopold Weiss. He was second of three children and descendant of a long line of rabbis. His father had broken away from this tradition and had become a barrister. Leopold spent his early years (1900-1913) in Lwów. He learned to read and speak Hebrew fluently; acquired some knowledge of Aramaic and studied the Old Testament in original. In 1914, his family moved to Vienna; young Leopold escaped from school. In 1918, after the collapse of the Austrian empire, he joined the University of Vienna to study history of art and philosophy.

Leopold had a restless nature. In the summer of 1920, he travelled all over Central Europe, doing 'all manner of short-lived jobs'. In 1922, he became a correspondent for *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers of Germany and Europe. Leopold travelled extensively, visiting Cairo, 'Ammān, Jerusalem, Syria (which then included Lebanon as well) and Turkey.

Toward the end of 1923, Leopold was back in Vienna. It was around this time that he gained the reputation of being an expert on Arab and Middle Eastern affairs. He was given a contract to write a book, "Unromantisches Morgenland" ("The Unromantic Orient").

He finished the book in 1924 but it did not sell well. In spring, he went back to the Middle East, first stopping at Cairo where he spent sometime with Mustafā al-Marāghī, the future Shaikh of Al-Azhar. He tried to learn Arabic. In the summer of the same year, he travelled to 'Ammān, Damascus, Tripoli and Aleppo, then to Baghdad and the Kurdish mountains, to Iran and Afghanistan. On a winter day in Afghanistan, he was told by a man: "But thou art a Muslim, only thou dost not know it thyself".

Early in 1926, he was homebound via Merv, Samarkand, Bukhara and Tashkent and thence across the Turkoman steppes to the Urals and Moscow. Crossing the Polish frontier, he arrived in Frankfurt. Upon his return, he delivered a series of lectures at the Academy of Geopolitics in Berlin. He married Elsa, 41, a widow with a nine year old son, resigned from *Frankfurter Zeitung* and signed contracts to write for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of Zürich, the *Telegraaf* of Amsterdam and the *Kölnische Zeitung* of Cologne.

In September 1926, while travelling in the Berlin subway with Elsa, twenty-six year old Leopold Weiss had a powerful experience during which he became aware of the spiritual torments of his fellow travellers. He came home and found his copy of the Qur'an at his desk, still open where he had left it. His eyes fell on the open page where he read *Sura at-takāthur*. The next day, he sought out an Indian friend, the head of the small Muslim community in Berlin, and embraced Islam; Elsa followed a few weeks later.

Thus, Leopold Weiss became Muhammad Asad. The same year, Asad, Elsa and her son, Heinrich Ahmad Schiemann (who now lives in Germany), went for *hāj*. They travelled by ship. Shortly after reaching Makkah, Elsa died. Asad was devastated.

A few weeks later, he met young Prince Faysal in the library who invited him to the royal palace. This started his life-long relationship with the Al-Saud family. Around 1928, he married Munira bint Hussein As-Shammari of the As-Shammari tribe from Haa'il. During these years in Saudi Arabia, he worked on early Islamic history, travelled extensively, lived among the Bedouins, went on a mission to Cyrenacia to assess the needs of the guerrillas fighting the Italians under the command of 'Umar al-Mukhtār and wrote for the European newspapers.

In 1932, a son, Talal Asad, was born (he now lives in America). Two years later, Asad left Arabia for India with plans to move on to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia but Muhammad Iqbal

persuaded him to stay in India and join the struggle for the creation of Pakistan. In 1934, Asad published a book that would make him famous throughout the Muslim world: "Islam at the Crossroads".

At the outbreak of World War II, Asad was interned by the British government. During the war, his sister and father were killed in concentration camps in Auschwitz and Treblinka. He was released after the war and joined the movement for the creation of Pakistan. In 1947, his ten years of extensive labour on the translation and commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhāri* was lost during the riots. After partition, he moved to Lahore and worked for the Punjab government in the Department of Religious Reconstruction. In the early 1950s, he joined the foreign service and was sent to New York, as Pakistan's representative to the United Nations. In 1955, he resigned from the foreign service, published "The Road to Mecca" and started work on his translation of the Qur'an.

Endowed with unusual linguistic abilities and personal experiences so rich and diverse that they seem to be coming out of a fairy tale, Muhammad Asad's life traversed a vast cultural and geographical terrain: from a highly disciplined childhood in Europe to the sun-burnt deserts of Arabia. At the same time, his was a life devoted to scholarly pursuits which have produced some of the most remarkable Islamic texts in the twentieth century: "The Road to Mecca"; "Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam"; "Islam at the Crossroads", "The Principles of State and Government In Islam"; "This Law of Ours and Other Essays" and his *magnum opus*, "The Message of the Qur'an".

Asad's life is also an enduring tale of one man's spiritual and emotional travail in the face of enormous personal losses and upheavals. But Asad remained steadfast to his calling and devoted all his energies to the problem of regeneration of the Muslim community.

Last month, a small one-day symposium was held in Vienna to mark Asad's one hundredth birthday. The fact that not many people will be celebrating his birth-day in Pakistan is indicative of how we treat those who devote their lives for the noble causes that were once at the heart of Muslims of the subcontinent. It is also a sad comment on the state of our collective amnesia.

(in: *The News International* (Lahore), 23rd June, 2000, p. 6).

Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal, M.A.
No. 9, 1934
Amritsar, Punjab

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دوست عزیز! -
ہرے پچھلے دنوں میں اس قدر ہمدردی سے دیکھا گیا ہے کہ
دعا خیر کی دعا ہے، تہذیب آگاہی ہے جو ہم کو تہذیب
پرگاہ ہے اور ہمارے وطن ہے۔ خیر بہتر ہے۔
ان دنوں میں عفر کر رہی ہے۔
انا پتہ کسی قدر غریب ہے مگر پانچ دن تہذیب احمدیہ
میں پانچ دنوں کا کلاس کر رہا ہے۔ مگر بہت نرم تر ہے۔
نہت ہے جو لوگوں کو کھانے والے ہے۔ وہ دست آور ہے۔ دن
روزت میں ابھر کر برہنہ تہذیب سے منکر کر رہا ہے۔
تہذیب ہوتی ہے۔
انا پتہ دعا خیر کی دعا ہے۔ ایک گویا جو پانچ دنوں میں
گھٹا جاتی ہے۔ اگر یہ مقدار دینی کر رہا ہے تو یہ بد مزہ نامی

آواز میں غیب سے تبدیل ہے۔ دعا خیر کو شروع کی تھی
کچھ سنی ہے مگر یا کچھ دعا کہتے رہتے جو خداوند ہے۔ آواز
یہ 'humanity' علوم ہوتا ہے۔ بلکہ ہلاک کرتا ہے۔

محمد اسد

نازیں نیازی
پتہ: ...

Iqbal's letter to Nazir Niazi (11 August 1934). Asad conveys addressee's message to Iqbal.

K. M. AZAM

UNFORGETTABLE PAKISTANI

Appreciating the contribution of Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal (*The News*: June 23, 2000), a few more lines are being penned down to rekindle the memories of that unforgettable Pakistani, Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss).

My father's rambling Jamālpur estate, on the left bank of Upper Bari Doab Canal, near Pathānkot in India, was a visiting point of Muslim luminaries from all over India and even abroad. As a child, I was overawed by their presence and used to mentally classify them according to the size, colour and shape of their beards. Among those visitors Muhammad Asad, the tall sahib with a goatee beard stood out.

For many reasons, I used to look forward fondly to his occasional visits from Lahore. He was kind and friendly and never forgot to bring a small gift for me. However, our only communication was by making faces at each other, as he knew many languages, Punjabi not among them, and I only the latter. His big shiny car was much more impressive than my father's fading old Ford. Also, he used to be accompanied by his Arab wife, Khāla Munira, and his little devil of a son, Talal, who was almost exactly the same as myself. Their visit was always an event for our extended family. This was in the 1930s.

Then, immediately at the start of the second world war, Muhammad Asad, a German-Jewish convert to Islam, was promptly arrested as a possible German sympathiser and transported to a comfortable internment near Poona, but without books and his work on Islam. The castle of his gracious living in Lahore had collapsed. His belongings were transferred to our house and his 'state of the art' English-Arabic press was stored in a warehouse at Dar-ul-Islam, which my father had established in 1936 on the other side of the Upper Bari Doab Canal.

Khāla Munira and Talal came to live with us, till in the heat of the war in 1941 or 1942, they too were interned. The day of their departure from Jamālpur was a day of widespread mourning. Everyone wept, including the Muslim inspector of police who came to take them

into custody. I sorely missed Talal's companionship. But at last Muhammad Asad had his family with him.

Then in 1945, at the end of war, the day of their joyous return came. A large gathering of eager men assembled at the nearby Sarna Railway Station to receive them, including Maulana Abu Al-A'la Maududi, the dignified rector of Dar-ul-Islam and head of the newly-established All India Jamaat-ul-Islami.

Muhammad Asad picked up the pieces of his shattered life and decided to establish his home at Dalhousie, a hill station, only fifty miles from Jamālpur. To mobilise resources for his new establishment, Muhammad Asad had to sell his press. This was bought by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Three of Nizam's officials came to Jamālpur to seal the deal. Muhammad Asad called me and Talal to show us their bank cheque, which was for 20,000 rupees, a large sum of money in those days.

Muhammad Asad rented a fine bungalow in Dalhousie, named Fairview, overlooking the Beas river valley. After my matriculation examination in the summer of 1947, I was sent to live with the Asads to learn some manners, rustic that I was. Muhammad Asad had restarted his Islamic quarterly *Arafat*. He used to work on it all day long. If my and Talal's antics got out of hand, he used growl from his study like a tiger. Muhammad Asad had hired a German, a keen mountaineer and photographer, Mr. Krennik, who used to double as Talal's tutor and *Arafat's* production and circulation manager.

Not only was Muhammad Asad an outstanding Islamic scholar, he was also a keen political observer. When the British government declared its intention of giving independence to India and Pakistan, he said, "By God, the British are now going to create the state of Israel."

Muhammad Asad was a staunch supporter of the Muslim League and of Pakistan, while Maulana Abu Al-A'la Maududi was somewhat lukewarm toward this idea. They used to have light-hearted arguments with each other on this issue.

In early 1947, Muhammad Asad implored my father to exchange his estate with one of the large Sikh landholders in Haripur, north of Rawalpindi. My father was reluctant to do so, as he believed that at least his Jamālpur estate, if not his extensive forest on the road to Dalhousie, would fall to Pakistan. Had he taken Asad's advice he would have saved himself a lot of botheration later on.

Soon after the partition, Muhammad Asad was invited to lead the newly created Department of Islamic Reconstruction in the government of the Punjab, at Lahore, with the quarterly *Arafat* as an

organ of the department. However, with the change in the government, this short-lived department was closed, and Asad moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Karachi as a deputy secretary.

It was from this position that the first prime minister of Pakistan sent him as a roving envoy to the Arab countries. A special Pakistani passport had to be issued to him, as he refused to travel on the British-Pakistan passport. Subsequently, he was posted as the minister/alternate representative to the United Nations at New York. During this tenure he met and married his third wife, a Dutch-American Muslim lady, Pola Hamida; as a consequence had to resign from Pakistan's Foreign Service.

When I went up to Oxford in 1954, I used to stay with Khāla Munira and Talal in London. Naturally, I was resentful of Asad's marrying again and leaving them in the lurch. However, Asad was a generous man and would not have done such a thing but for his own financial difficulties. Anyhow, I did travel to Geneva especially to meet him in 1958 on my way back to Pakistan.

We had a long discussion on the future of the Muslim world, and he was, as always, highly optimistic. He asked me to write to him on the political situation in Pakistan. I did that and he wrote back expressing appreciation for my analysis.

I quoted him extensively in my paper "Islam and the Welfare State", which I was assigned to write while in training in 1968 at the Pakistan Administrative Staff College. I sent him a copy of this paper but did not get a reply. Like all great intellectuals, he was lethargic and a man of changing moods!

In spite of a cherished desire to invite him to visit us in Cairo and Baghdad, I never got around to doing that. For one thing, he was always on the move and I never had his up-to-date address.

Throughout the years, I have remained a keen student of his writings and consider his "Message of the Qur'an" a wonderful contribution to Islamic learning, although I do not share the central stance of his interpretation of the Qur'an.

Unlike him, I do not believe that one can understand the Qur'an through rationalism alone.

The "original purpose and meaning" of the Qur'an can only be grasped when reason in full measure is supplemented by intuition (*wajdān*) and absorption (*jadhb*). A balanced combination of these inner forces was named as *ishq* (passion) by Iqbal, who had used this term in the sense of a creative intuitive fervour (*josh-e-wajdān*). Without *ishq*,

reason can neither reach truth nor have vision. It is due to his rationalistic approach that Asad is totally perplexed by the *al-ghayb* (unseen) of the Qur'an and by such creatures of the 'unseen' as the Jinn.

Although we were separated since 1958, Muhammad Asad always lived among us. My children, who never met him, know him as if they, like me, had lived long with him. Once my daughter, Samia and her husband, Dr. Javed Hayat Khan, on hearing that he was attending a conference at the Islamic Centre in London, rushed to see him but found out he had gone a day earlier. Now he is gone from all of us for ever. Yet his simplicity, friendly disposition and sincerity to Muslims all over the world lives. May Allah bless his gracious soul.

(in: *The News International* (Lahore), 1st July 2000, p. 6).

M. IKRAM CHAGHATAI

MUHAMMAD ASAD'S INDIAN YEARS (1932-1947)

Muhammad Asad's (1900-1992) *The Road to Mecca*, 'an impressionistic self-portrait', tells us a story of his spiritual journey that ultimately led him to Mecca where his restless soul found an abode of solace. This personal memoir gives a vivid picture of his young age and covers only one-third of his eventful life. Some of the reviewers pressed for its continuation,¹ ranging from the period when he returned from Arabia and set out for other distant lands. It is said that he himself realized the need for writing its sequel and, it is reported that he completed it but, unfortunately, the script has not yet been published.²

¹ Samuel C. Chew writes: "It is greatly to be hoped that some day, when diplomatic discretion permits, Mr. Asad will carry his story beyond 1932." (see "A Westerner finds more in Islam than in Christianity and Judaism", in: *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 15 August 1954, p. 3. see also Mushtak Parker: "Death of a Muslim Mentor", in: *The Middle East*, No. 211, May 1992, p. 28)

² In the new edition of *The Road to Mecca* (Gibraltar 1980, reprinted frequently) Asad has added a 'Postscript' of five pages (dated Tangier, 1973) in which he tried to show his close friendly contacts with the Saudi Arabian monarchy.

As listed in posthumous editions of *The Road to Mecca* (1993) and *The Message of the Qur'an* (1997), the much-awaited sequel of the first one is also included under the title *Homecoming of the Heart*—a name that always echoed in his mind. In an obituary note, Hasan Zillur Raḥīm writes that "After Asad died in Spain 1992, I wrote to Pola Hamida Asad, who informed that the sequel to *The Road to Mecca* was only partially completed by Asad—part one [1932-1952]—and that she herself would complete part two [1952]. It would be called *Homecoming of the Heart*, 'a title which he himself suggested' " (See H. Z. Raḥīm's article in the present volume).

Martin Kramer, a Jewish historian, comments on this forthcoming part of *The Road to Mecca* as such: "In these last years, he [Asad] reportedly began work on a sequel to *The Road to Mecca*, tentatively entitled *Homecoming of the Heart*. The title is said to have alluded to his contemplated return to Saudi Arabia at the

Asad spent almost six years in Saudi Arabia (end of May 1927-September 1932) and during this time Hāj Asadullah, as he was commonly known there, enjoyed every possible facility for which no other converted European Muslim could dream of under the strict rules imposed by the Saudi government. He entered Mecca without any impediment and resided near Ka'ba, journeyed throughout Arabia; met people of every class and official persons, stayed in Riyadh as a royal guest of Ibn Saud (1880-1953), married twice (1928 and 1930) and from the second wife, Munira bint Husayn ash-Shammari (d. 1978), was born a son, Talāl Asad (1932—). His Austrian wife, Elsa Schiemann (Aziza, née Specht), however, died of a tropical disease and his step-son, Heinrich Schiemann (Ahmad) was reclaimed by her parents. In spite of all these worldly facilities and personal relationship with the King and some other influential members of ruling class of Saudi Arabia, he finally made up his mind to go and live somewhere else. How this change happened and under which circumstances he decided to leave Arabia and proceeded to other lands, he nowhere mentions any reason. His 'bedouin spirit' might be a cause but there were some other factors which would have played a vital role in taking this decision such as:

i) In late 1928, 'Abdullah Damluji, an Iraqi adviser to Ibn Saud, submitted a report to the British on "Bolshevik and Soviet Penetration" in which a question had been raised that whether there was any link between Muhammad Asad and the Bolshevik consulate in Jiddah but it was difficult to answer it with any degree of certainty.³

ii) Judd Teller viewed that the rapidly growing Arab-Jewish tensions in Palestine made it dangerous, to some extent, for a man of Jewish extraction like Asad to stay any longer in Arabia.⁴

iii) Asad's marriage with Munira of the tribe of Shammar created some problems for him, as the members of her family were suspected of

invitation of Prince Salman (b. 1936), governor of Riyadh, and one of Ibn Saud's sons. It is not clear whether such a return was a realistic prospect, or whether the title hinted at a more spiritual homecoming."

(M. Kramer's article in the present volume, pp. 239-261)

In her letter (dated 5th February 1997), Pola Hamida Asad provides some information about *Homecoming* to Günter Windhager, an Austrian anthropologist who has authored a well-documented biography of Asad but, unluckily, it describes the early part of his life, from Galicia to Arabia (1900-1927), see *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad*, Vienna 2nd ed., 2003 (2000), Introduction, p. 24, f.n. 19.

³ Cf. M. Kramer's article, *ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

intrigues against the King.

iv) Asad pinned his hopes on Ibn Saud who would "bring about a revival of the Islamic idea in its fullest sense" but he was deeply disappointed by the monarch's harsh laws, punitive measures, autocratic way of rulership and his lack of interest for an Islamic revival.

v) At that time, another Western convert (1930), H. St. John (Sheikh 'Abdallah) Philby (1885-1960), was present in the court of Ibn Saud and took much interest in exploration and political affairs.⁵ He was a strange and eccentric Englishman who became a prominent explorer, map-maker and Arabist. The rivalry between Philby and Asad is evident from the former's review of *The Road to Mecca* and latter's remarks about

⁵ See for detail, G. H. Ryckmans: *Saint John B. Philby, le "Sheikh Abdallah" (3 avril 1885-30 septembre 1960)*. Istanbul 1961, pp. 24, 3 plates—Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 10; *Harry St. John Bridger Philby, A Pilgrim in Arabia*. London: Robert Halle, 1946 and Hermann Wissmann: "Abdallah H. Stj. B. Philby (1885-1960). Sein Leben und Wirken", in: *Die Welt des Islams*, N.S. 7 (1961), pp. 100-141; on Philby's death he merited a two-volume obituary in *The Times*. See also John S. Habib: *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1978, index; Mohammad Almana: *Arabia Unified. A Portrait of Ibn Saud*. London: Hutchinson Benham, 1980, ch. 9, pp. 145-163.

⁶ In: *Middle East Journal*, 9 (Winter 1955), pp. 81-82. Philby accused the writer of "vagueness and unusual naiveté" and considered him as a journalist looking always of a story and a man without any flair for geographical work or political analysis. He also comments:

"His bazaar scenes, religious festivals, desert sunsets, *et hoc genus omne* of local colour suggest a patchwork of newspaper articles or cuttings strung together for a new(s) story, in which the *leit-motiv* is provided by his own gropings toward an emotional dénouement."

As far as Asad is concerned, he did not even refer Philby in any of his writings. Once a reputed Pakistani journalist met Asad in Lisbon (1987) and interviewed. After fifteen years, he wrote an article based on his recollections in which he informs:

"I asked him about Saint John Philby (famous spy Kim Philby's father), the other friend of Ibn Sa'ūd who in many ways was a precursor of Asad himself: an expert in Arabic and relentless explorer of the Arabian desert. His expression of dislike was immediate. Philby's knowledge of Arabic was such that he often contested the meaning of some words with the Arabs. Asad's own grasp was tremendous, which enabled him to challenge some of the meanings accepted by Imam Bukhāri in his collection of *ḥadīth*. But Asad did not think that Philby was a believer, nor did he trust the loyalty he showed to Ibn Sa'ūd."

(Khaled Ahmed's article, included in the present volume, pp. 287-291)

his opponent.⁷ Their unfriendly behaviour might be a reason of Asad's disillusionment about Ibn Saud's policies and he ultimately made up his mind to leave Arabia.

vi) Asad was employed by Ibn Saud as a secret agent and sent on a clandestine mission to Kuwait (1929), aimed at tracing the funds and guns that were flowing to Faysal al-Dawish, a rebel against the Arabian ruler. Besides, under his leadership another secret mission was sent to Cyrenacia to support the anti-Italian struggle of the Sanusi movement whose leader, Sayyid Ahmad (1873-1932), was in exile in Saudi Arabia. The mission failed (January 1931) and the movement was crushed by the Italian forces. Philby refuted these statements and wrote that there was "no independent contemporary evidence" that Asad had undertaken "secret missions" for Ibn Saud or the Sanusi leader.⁸ Nevertheless, Asad himself furnished the information about these two missions and one can conjecture about another official or private mission which would have aimed at the dissemination of specific religious ideas of Saudi government to other parts of Islamic world.

vii) In those days, Asad was earnestly aspiring for an equitable and progressive society, based on the Islamic injunctions which would be a model state for others to follow. He was always eager to support any movement, particularly in the Muslim countries, that was genuinely striving for the fulfillment of the ideal of such a state. After his disappointment from the Arabian monarch, he was in search of any region where his long-felt desire for creating an ideal Islamic state could materialize.

Any one of these factors would be enough for Asad to turn his back on his enchanted Arabia and look towards other regions. As a correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung* he had made long, toilsome and perilous journeys to almost all the Muslim countries of the Middle East including Afghanistan. Now he planned to cross the borders of adjoining areas like Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia but when he arrived in India he became so busy in different affairs that he had to abandon his programme of further travelling and decided to remain here permanently.⁹

⁷ *The Road to Mecca*, New York, 1954, chap. xi, "Jihad".

⁸ Cf. Reinhard Schulze: "Anmerkungen zum Islamverständnis von Muhammad Asad (1900-1992)", in: *Der Wisch* (Vienna), March 2005, p. 27.

⁹ *The Road to Mecca*, p. 2.

Muhammad Asad's Arrival in India

As soon as Asad reached India, the secret agencies of the British government kept a constant eye on his activities. One of the intelligence reports informs that after his arrival in Karachi by ship, he proceeded to Amritsar by train in order to meet Ismā'īl Ghaznawī, a political "activist" of the city.¹⁰ His primary aim was to tour India "with a view to get in touch with all important workers". The authenticity of the information contained in this intelligence report is doubtful but it indicates some links which Asad had before he stepped on Indian soil.

Maulana Muhammad Ismā'īl Ghaznawī (Amritsar 1898—Lahore 1960)¹¹ belonged to a well-known family of Ahl-i Ḥadīth '*ulamā*' of the subcontinent and his ancestors were closely associated with the political and religious movements of Ḥijāz. His father, 'Abdul Wāḥid Ghaznawī (d. 1930), and his uncle, 'Abdur Raḥīm Ghaznawī both exported Kashmiri *shawls* to Kuwait where they met 'Abdul 'Azīz Ibn Saud and his father Amir 'Abdur Raḥmān before the present Saudi Arabia was established in 1926. They also took some lessons of *ḥadīth* from these Indian '*ulamā*'.¹² The newly-emerged state of Saudi Arabia patronized the members of Ghaznawī family especially Ismā'īl Ghaznawī when after the death of his father, he was frequently invited by the King and was appointed as a representative of Saudi government for the Ḥaj affairs in India.¹³ On 30 March 1932 Ismā'īl Ghaznawī went to perform Ḥaj with other Indian pilgrims¹⁴ who were invited by Ibn Saud in his royal palace and treated them hospitably (13 April). On this occasion, his speech was mainly concerned with the politics of Ḥijāz and advised them to strictly strive for Islamic unity.¹⁵ On 20 June 1932, Ismā'īl came back via

¹⁰ "History sheet of Herr Leopold Weiss alias Mohammad Asad Ullah Vyce. An Austrian convert to Mohammadanism," prepared by the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India, included in letter from E.J.D. Colvin, Principal Secretary, His Highness' Government Jammu and Kashmir (Jammu) to Lieut.-Col. L.E. Lang, Resident in Kashmir (Sialkot), 30 January 1934, British Library (India Office and Oriental), R/1/1/4670, cf. Martin Kramer's article, *ibid.*

¹¹ According to Khālid Ghaznawī (1927—), his son, Maulana died in 1964. Most of the information presented in the following nos. (12, 13 and 22) has been taken from my interview with Khālid.

¹² Khālid Ghaznawī's interview.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Inqilāb* (daily newspaper, Lahore), 30 March 1932.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, dated 20 April 1932.

Karachi¹⁶ and after a few days he described in detail the facilities offered by the Saudi government during the Haj and thanked Ibn Saud for his excellent cooperation in this regard.¹⁷ As stated earlier, Asad reached India, also via Karachi in September 1932, certainly not with Ismā'īl but after a few months separately.

Ismā'īl Ghaznawi was a staunch follower of his family traditions and in his youth, he was emotionally attached to various political and religious movements of the country. He founded All India Pilgrims' Protection League, presided over the Anjuman-i Ishā'at-i Islam (Amritsar, 1927) and started publishing a weekly paper entitled *Khādim al-Harmayn* (Urdu, Amritsar) which severely criticized the policy of British government in Palestine.¹⁸

About one month after Ismā'īl's return from Haj (July, 1932), the Intelligence Department of the British government put his name among "suspected persons" and instructed the concerned authorities to keep him under constant watch. The native press strongly protested and demanded for taking off all restrictions so that Maulana could move freely.¹⁹ Unmindful of all such protests and demands, the concerned department continued their "secret operation" upto the end of the year.²⁰ Next year, the *hājīs* were heavily lathicharged on their ship 'Akbar' in Bombay and Ismā'īl was not allowed to leave the country. A legal case was registered against him in the Bombay court. A special Defence Committee was constituted which imprisoned him for three months in jail and fined three hundred rupees with the allegation that he attacked Reynold, Deputy Commissioner.²¹ Ismā'īl's close contact with the king of Saudi Arabia continued even after the Partition (1947) and since 1932 he had been receiving a monthly salary from Saudi Arabia for looking

¹⁶ Ibid., 19 June 1932.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28 April and 25 June 1932.

¹⁸ See Ahmad Saeed: *Muslim India (1857-1947). A Biographical Dictionary*. Repr.: Lahore: Institute of Pakistan Historical Research, 2005 (1997), pp. 174-175.

¹⁹ *Inqilāb*, 25 July 1932.

²⁰ Ibid., 13 October 1932. Meanwhile, Maulana went to Afghanistan for participating in the "Jashn-i Istiqlāl", (Ibid., 10 August 1932)

²¹ For Maulana's arrest, final decision of the court and the protest in the local press, see *Inqilāb* 9 March 1933, 25 July 1933, 26 August 1933, 5 September 1933, 6 September 1933, 21 September 1933, 24 September 1933, Maulana was released on bail but again arrested, see Ibid., 2 December 1933, 11 August 1934, 24 August 1934, 31 August 1934, 7 September 1934. Mawlana appealed but rejected, see Ibid., 29 September 1934.

after the Haj affairs and other assignments.²²

Ismā'īl Ghaznawi had friendly relations with Ibn Saud who supported him, both financially and politically. Their creedal affinities also brought them closer with each other and the King encouraged him, directly or indirectly, to popularize the Wahhābi movement in India. Besides, Ismā'īl was also an enthusiastic political worker of All India Muslim League and played an active role in the Kashmir Movement. His second wife belonged to a Kashmiri family and he had cordial relations with all the prominent leaders of this Movement including its founder Shaikh Muhammad 'Abdullah. The other members of his family particularly Maulana Dā'ūd Ghaznai (1895-1963), enthusiastically took part in this Movement.²³

In September 1932, Muhammad Asad reached India for the first time.²⁴ The Ghaznawi family of Amritsar was his host, so his early contacts were established with the Wahhābi 'ulema' who favoured Ibn Saud for reviving the true spirit of Islam.²⁵ It is not clear as to what

²² Khālid Ghaznawi's interview, *op. cit.* In 1951, his father performed Haj and he accompanied him.

²³ Maulana Dā'ūd Ghaznawi, General Secretary Majlis Markaziyya Ahrār-i Islam Hind, warned the Kashmiri leaders about the treacherous trap in the guise of B. J. Glancy Commissioner's recommendations. In a letter, he described what he had already done for the oppressed people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and assured them that his party (e.g. Ahrār) would support them by all means for achieving their ultimate aim—the freedom of Kashmir. (see *Inqilāb*, 16 October 1932).

²⁴ Cf. Reinhard Schulze, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Windhager, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁵ During his stay in the subcontinent, most of his intimate friends were Ahl-i Hadith 'ulemā', like Muhammad Ali Qaṣūri (1892-1956), Muhyi-ud-Din Qaṣūri (1889-1971), Dā'ūd Ghaznawi (1895-1963), Abu Yahya Imam Khan Naushehrawi, Muhammad Hanif Nadvi (1908-1987) and particularly Muhammad Husain Bābri (1902-1983) who had a precious collection of Asad's letters and photos and he considered Asad as "Pakka Wahhābi" (solid Wahhābi). Most of them were Asad's colleagues when he was appointed as the Director, Department of Islamic Reconstruction (Lahore 1948); see for detail *Tahrik-i Ahl-i Hadith*. By Qāzi Muhammad Aslam Saif, Lahore 2005, pp. 331-350 (Ghaznawi family), pp. 364-366; a comprehensive Urdu book on Ghaznawi family by Abdur Rashid Iraqi, published from Karachi (2003); and M. Ishāq Bhatti's Urdu books entitled *Qasūri Khāndān* (Mamun Kānjan 1994), *Nuqūsh-i Azmat-i Rafta* (Lahore, 1996), *Qāfla-i Hadith* (Lahore 2003), *Karwān-i Salaf* (Faisalabad, 2003) and *Barr-i Saghir key Ahl-i Hadith Khuddām-i Qur'an* (also included a detailed article on Asad, in print); *Tarikh-i Ahl-i Hadith* by M. Ibrahim Sialkoti, Lahore 2004; *Ahl-i Hadith kee Tasnifi Khidmāt*, by Muhammad

extent Asad toed the religio-political policy of these 'ulemā'. According to the British Intelligence Report, he was eager to get into touch with all important workers",²⁶ probably, of Kashmir Movement, as he soon "involved himself with the local community of Kashmiri Muslims", and in 1933 he made an appearance in Srinagar, where an intelligence report again had him spreading Bolshevik ideas."²⁷

In this context, a passage of Sir Muhammad Yāmīn Khān's autobiography under the title *Nāma-i A'māl* (Urdu) provides very significant information about Asad's activities in Arabia and in the early part of his Indian stay. It runs thus:

"According to the Intelligence Police Report, Asad was staying in Srinagar (Kashmir) and there he was waiting for a person who was to come from Russia. Another Intelligence Report came from Jiddah in which it was stated that a few Muslims held a private meeting on the occasion of Hāj and consulted each other about some political affairs. Accompanied by some of them, Asad Weiss came from Mecca to Jiddah and arranged for a private meeting with Russian Consul. The names of all these persons are known to me but I want to keep them in secret...

I personally examined the concerned secret file but could not find the Jiddah Report there. I knew the names of the persons who were mentioned in this Report. Two persons from Aligarh got immediate permission for performing Hāj. They were absolutely not interested in Hāj ceremony and everybody knew their indifference towards such religious observances. They were sent to Mecca on government expenditure and they were bound to inform the concerned authorities about those Indians who were anti-government and try to find out why in that year a huge number of them embarked for Hijaz for Hāj."²⁸

It is evident from these confidential reports and personal investigations that Asad's first Indian journey was not undertaken for mere travelling or reporting to different European newspapers. It is

Mustaqim Salafi, Benares 1995.

²⁶ See above, no. 10.

²⁷ C.I.D. Report of 20 November 1933, British Library (India Office and Oriental), R/1/1/4670, Cf. Martin Kramer, note 25.

²⁸ Vol. II, Lahore 1970, pp. 817-818. See for detail below, note 73.

certain that during the Haj of 1932 he met some of the young spearheads of political movements of Indian Muslims including Ismā'īl Ghaznawī and chalked out a programme to speed up their struggle. Two years before, Iqbal, in his Presidential address in Allahabad, 1930, presented an idea of a separate independent Muslim state which must have certainly widened the political scenario of the subcontinent and helped such movements to gain momentum. No doubt, Asad came to India with a programme but one can hardly say what it was. As soon as he entered India, the British government was alarmed, its intelligence agencies became vigilant and kept him under constant observation everywhere. It means that his intended programme was repugnant to the colonial interests of the British government.

After reaching India, Asad rushed to Amritsar where Ismā'īl Ghaznawī was waiting for him impatiently. Nobody knows and no contemporary source provides any information about his activities in Amritsar as well as in Lahore and the "important workers" of which political party or religious group he wished to keep in touch with. Probably, in the beginning of 1933, Asad made his first public appearance when he started his "lecture tour" and delivered a lecture on "Islamic and Western Civilization", held in the Habibiyya Hall (Islamia College, Lahore), chaired by Dr. Barkat 'Alī Quraishī (Principal and organized by the Arabic Society of the College).²⁹ After two weeks, he was invited by Delhi, Aligarh and Jāmiā Millīa (Delhi) to lecture in the widely-known educational centres of Islamic learning. It was also announced that after this hectic tour, he would come back to Lahore and deliver two lectures in Barkat 'Alī Muhammadan Hall on 22nd and 23 February.³⁰ The topics of these lectures are not known but one can assume that he expressed his views on the cultural onslaught of the West on Islam, how the latter could survive due to its innate potentialities and what the measures would be adopted for the Islamic revival according to the requirements of the modern world.

Apart from academic preoccupations, Asad was taking an active part in the "agitation" of the Kashmiri Muslims. The leading members of his host family, particularly Ismā'īl Ghaznawī and his cousin Dā'ūd

²⁹ *Inqilāb*, 2 and 6 February 1933. Exact date of this lecture was 5 February and lecturer's name is given as "Asad Leopold Weiss: a converted German Muslim".

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 February 1933, under the caption: "Lectures of Haji Muhammad Asad—a German Journalist" with a comment that he "is an enthusiastic and competent Muslim... His views are useful for the educated Muslims."

Ghaznawi, were also supporting him. The British-backed Mahārājah of the State of Jammu and Kashmir was committing atrocities on the Muslims of Kashmir who were putting up resistance with the cooperation of their brethren living in Punjab.³¹ According to the secret record of the British government, Asad was in Srinagar in 1933 and was trying to spread Bolshevik ideas,³² and disliked the presence of an 'European' in the vicinity of their puppet government of Kashmir who gave an impetus to the oppressed Muslim population for their struggle of liberation from the Hindu junta. Finally, he was "externed" from Kashmir without any substantial evidence for taking this extreme action.³³

As a correspondent of *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Asad had deeply observed the political, religious and social circumstances of almost all the Islamic countries of the Middle East. His detailed reports, sent to his German newspaper, explicitly indicate his penetrating political vision and deep intellectual insight. His analytical approach was an insurmountable obstacle for him to label any of them as Islamic state in the true sense of the word. After conversion, the centre of his aspirations was Saudi Arabia where he was emotionally satisfied. In the beginning he was expecting much from Ibn Saud but later on he was completely disillusioned and considered his life as a "tragic waste". His 'thirst' 'for the ruler, state, or society which would embody his ideal Islam' became unquenched and he was groping for an ultimate end of his quest. Once he saw a ray of hope in Sanusi movement, as he himself says:

"Like so many other Muslims, I had for years pinned my hopes on Ibn Saud as the potential leader of an Islamic revival; and now that these hopes had proved futile, I could see in the entire Muslim world only one movement that genuinely strove for the fulfillment of the ideal of an Islamic society: the Sanusi

³¹ See David Gilmartin: *Empire and Islam. Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*. Berkeley, University of California Press 1988, pp. 96-99, "The Ahrar and the Kashmir Agitation."

³² See-above, note 27.

³³ Lieut.-Colonel L.E. Lang, Resident in Kashmir. (Sialkot) to B.J. Glancy, Political Secretary, Government of India, Foreign and Political Department (New Delhi), 31 January 1934, British Library (India Office and Oriental), R/1/1/4670, cf. Martin Kramer, *op. cit.*

movement, now fighting a last-ditch battle for survival."³⁴

Unfortunately, this movement was crushed by the Italians and its failure caused a severe wave of disappointment and dismay for him. But soon he came out from this disheartening situation and pinned his hopes on Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) who a couple of years before presented an idea of a separate Islamic state, afterwards named Pakistan—"a dream that demanded to be fulfilled" and "for which", Asad writes "I myself had worked and striven since 1933".³⁵ This dream became a reality in 1947 and Asad was considered as its "an intellectual co-founder."

Muhammad Asad and Iqbal

It is not certain when Asad heard the name of Iqbal or met him. As stated above, Asad started lecturing in Lahore and in other big cities of northern India in the beginning of 1933. In those days, Iqbal was in Spain, therefore he could not attend or preside any of these scholarly gatherings.³⁶ Asad frequently visited Lahore and his short and long sojourns in this city were numerous. In the middle of 1933, he might have had an opportunity to meet Iqbal and exchange views about their mutual interests. At that time, Asad was spending most of his time in Srinagar and was secretly involved in accelerating the Kashmiri Muslims' movement against the atrocities of the Hindu Mahārājah. Being a Kashmiri himself, Iqbal strongly supported this movement, aimed at liberating his ancestral homeland. Whatever the cause of their first meeting may have been, it is an undeniable fact that Iqbal left a lasting impact on Asad's mind and opened new vistas for his approach to Islamic resurgence. Asad gave up his own scheduled programmes and followed in the footsteps of his "immortal spiritual leader".³⁷ In the opening section of *The Road to Mecca* he pays his homage to Iqbal in these words:

"...after leaving Arabia I went to India and there met the great

³⁴ *The Road to Mecca*, p. 325.

³⁵ See 'Introduction' of *Sahih Bukhari*. Eng. tr. By Muhammad Asad, new ed., Gibraltar 1981.

³⁶ He came back to Lahore on 26 February 1933.

³⁷ *Arafat* (Lahore), vol. 1, no. 1 (1948), "Calling on Muslims", fifth speech (also included in the present volume)

Muslim poet-philosopher and spiritual father of the Pakistan idea, Muhammad Iqbal. It was he who soon persuaded me to give up my plans of travelling to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and to remain in India to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state which as then hardly more than a dream in Iqbal's visionay mind. To me, as to Iqbal, the dream represented a way, indeed the only way, to a revival of all the dormant hopes of Islam, the creation of a political entity of people bound together not by common descent but by their common adherence to an ideology. For years I devoted myself to this ideal, studying, writing and lecturing, and in time gained something of a reputation as an interpreter of Islamic law and culture."³⁸

Most of Asad's writings, particularly penned before 1947, are reminiscent of Iqbal's political and philosophical concepts which made drastic changes in his *Lebensgefühl* (life-feeling) and *Weltanschauung*. He often quotes Iqbal's popular distichs in order to substantiate his viewpoint but generally the spirit of Iqbal's *Reconstruction* has profoundly permeated his articles and books.

Iqbal also knew Asad's vast experience of extensive travelling in the whole Muslim world, his proclivities and intellectual attainments and he intended to utilize them for the uplift of the prevalent standard of religious teaching in our educational institutions. For this purpose, he offered Asad headship of the Department of Islamic Theology in the Islamia College, Lahore. As a President of the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam,³⁹ Iqbal made continuous efforts for Asad's appointment in the College. Both corresponded with each other (from June to August 1934) for settling some basic procedural issues.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Nazir Niāzi,

³⁸ Ed. 1981, pp. 1-2.

³⁹ He was elected on this high post on 1 July 1934 and resigned on 15 December 1935 due to his decaying health, see *Iqbal awr Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam* (Urdu). By Muhammad Hanif Shāhid, Lahore 1976, pp. 65, 130.

⁴⁰ Asad's two letters (dated 12 and 31 July 1934), written to Iqbal, are still extant in original in the "Register of the Proceedings of the General Committee of the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam", volume for period of 1 July 1934 to 28 April 1937. The text of these two letters is reproduced below:

(i)

July 12 1934

Dear Dr. Iqbal Sahib

Your letter of 10th inst. has afforded me great pleasure. Your suggestion—teaching Theology at the Islamia College - is indeed a very good one, and I am in principle prepared to accept such a post if it is offered to me. The thing I imagine is not a simple teaching of Fikh as usually done by Maulvis, but a full and systematic course on the origin, the philosophy and the development of Islam since the first revelation of the Qur'an till the final collection of Hadis. Of course, matters of Fikh would automatically come in, but they would not form the only goal of my teaching. I feel certain that I will be able to accomplish the most necessary thing: to infuse into young Muslims, at least into some of them, that feeling of intellectual pleasure and satisfaction without which no tuition of religious matters can be of any use. I have no doubt whatever - provided of course, that I am free to build up the things as I wish them - that within a very short time, say two or three years, the Islamia College would become leading in Northern India as regards a philosophical tuition of Islamic theology. I am sure that you could help me with your advice. I have given you the outline of my ideas concerning your suggestion, but I think it would be better if I come to Lahore and discuss the whole directly with you. I intended to go to some hill for a fortnight, as I have to write certain things now and the summer climate of Delhi exerts a paralysing influence on me. So I have thought I could go as well to Dalhousie; thus I would have the opportunity of seeing you within the next few days. With the best wishes for your health.

Yours faithfully

Mohammed Asad

P.S. I should be obliged if you would write me as soon as possible so that I might be able to arrange my plans accordingly as I have told you, I must go to the hills in these days, but I would postpone my departure until I get your answer.

(ii)

31st July 1934

I have just received your letter of yesterday's date.

I thank you heartily for your endeavour in my matter. As to the proposed pay of Rs 250/- for the probationary period of six months, I shall accept if provided the Anjuman fixes, after that period, a salary on a graduated scale, like that of other professors of the college, as you suggested yourself; and that the salary should be in the beginning (that is after the probation) not less than Rs. 300. Do not think that I am trying to strike a bargain, I only desire to work efficiently and to form my future lectures and courses as an original scientific effort, as is done in European Universities and for this purpose I used (*sic*) a certain minimum of comfort which ensures complete mental rest. And also I would have to give up - as mentioned by me in previous letters - my connection with the continental newspapers who desire me to act, from next autumn, as their correspondent in the Near East. But on the other hand, I

Iqbal's young associate and Asad's neighbourer in Delhi, acted a role of middle-man but finally Asad declined this offer because of inadequate salary and so this appointment never materialized.⁴¹

regard my appointment at the Islamia College as a basis of a more extensive work in the service of Islam, and this is well worth to me.

I intend going to Kashmir after a few days, and I shall stop at Lahore to see you and discuss the matter finally. But if you could write me in the meantime about the definite view of the college committee, I would be very much obliged to you.

Thanking you once more, and hoping for a permanent improvement in your health.

(signed - Mohammed Asad)

(cf. *Searching for Solace. A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali: An Interpreter of the Qur'an*. By M. A. Sherif, Islamabad 2000 (Kuala Lumpur 1994), pp. 114-115.

⁴¹ In Iqbal's six letters (in Urdu) written to Nazir Niāzi, he mentioned Asad and his efforts to appoint him in the Islamia College, Lahore. The English translation of relevant excerpts of these letters are as under:

- i) "A letter was written to Mr. Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) but he did not reply. Please ask him whether he has received my letter or not." (27 June 1934)
- ii) "Let Muhammad Asad inform that the meeting of the College Committee will be held on Thursday and not on Tuesday. The decision will be conveyed to him." (23 July 1934)
- iii) "Please inform Muhammad Asad that the College Committee has sanctioned his appointment. The Committee has authorized me about his salary, initially for the six months' probationary period. After having the final approval of the Committee I shall write him a letter. In my opinion he must accept this low-salaried offer [Rs. 250/= per month] but there are many possibilities for his promotion." (28 July 1934)
- iv) "I have already written to you about Muhammad Asad. Today, I have received his letter. Let him inform about the decision of the College Committee that favours him. The Committee approved his appointment and authorized me to decide for his salary. I have not yet received the Committee's decision through proper channel. Maulawi Ghulam Muhyiddin, Secretary of the Anjuman, informed me personally. After receiving the information properly, I shall inform him. Presently, I only advise him to accept this offer in spite of low salary. He demanded Rs. 350/- per month but perhaps the College's meagre funds would not comply with his demand. He can himself make a reasonable reduction in his demand. I believe if he adequately re-organize the Department of Islamic Theology during the coming months, the Anjuman will definitely increase his salary. In the present situation, he must accept the salary of Rs. 250/-. If it seems impossible, inform me. He will get some extra money by

Since 1933 Asad was one of the regular visitors of Iqbal who always remained an inspiring personality for him. Most of his scholarly undertakings were suggested, commenced or guided by the poet-philosopher of the subcontinent and the reflections of Iqbal's thought are easily discernable in his writings of that period. Ideologically, he was a staunch follower of Iqbal and he devoted much of his time and energy to disseminate his political and philosophical concepts. Within the next five years (1933-1938), Asad was heavily engaged in performing his varied private and official responsibilities in Delhi, Srinagar and spared some time to meet his "spiritual father". When Iqbal fell ill and his physical condition decayed rapidly, Asad was perplexed and rushed to Lahore for doing something for him. Iqbal was fortunate enough to have almost every medical treatment but the process of apparent improvement was very slow. Once on the suggestion of an intimate friend, he made up his mind to go to Vienna for this purpose and sent his medical reports there but the paucity of funds did not allow him to proceed. Whether Asad favoured this proposal or not, is not known. But during his sojourn in Lahore, he contacted two German physicians, Dr. Selzer and Dr. Kalisch, who had been practicing for a long time in the city. With the consent of the patient, Asad personally brought them to Iqbal's residence who examined him carefully. Nazir Niāzi also accompanied Asad and the two German doctors and describes their meeting with Iqbal exactly one month before his death (21 April 1938). He writes:

-
- publishing his proposed journal." (30 July 1934)
- v) "Yesterday, Mr. Asad gave me your message." (11 August 1934)
- vi) "Shaikh Muhammad Asad is not in Lahore. I have not received any letter from him." (31 October 1934)

For the Urdu text of these six letters, see *Kulliyāt-i Makātib-i Iqbal*. Ed. by Sayyid Muzaffar Hussain Barni, Vol. III, Delhi 1993, pp. 531, 563, 571, 579-580, 597, 660.

According to an explanatory note by Nazir Niāzi, Muhammad Asad was jobless in those days and requested Iqbal to find a suitable post for him in the Islamic College, Lahore (cf. *Kulliyāt, op. cit.*, 3: 531)

Sayyid Nazir Niāzi (1900-1983), a renowned Iqbalist and a religious scholar; in 1932 (?) he met Asad in Kashmir through Dr. Athar Rashid, his colleague in Jāmia' Milliyya, Delhi. In Qarul Bagh (Delhi), he resided in the Asad's neighbourhood. After 1947, he was one of the senior staff members in the Department of Islamic Reconstruction (Lahore), constituted by the West Pakistan Government and headed by Muhammad Asad.

“21 March 1938

Asad has been expressing his opinion for a long time that the German doctors, who are practicing in Lahore, must be consulted about Iqbal's illness. Their medical system is different and it seems possible that they don't like to have any interruption in their own system, but the consultation with them will be useful. One of these doctors was Dr. Selzer and the other Dr. Kalisch. I had already told Asad that he could contact any one of them and take him to Iqbal's residence... I was informed that Asad gave a telephonic message about his appointment with Dr. Selzer and asked me to come to his house.

At 2 p.m. Asad entered his house with Dr. Selzer and then we all three reached Javid Manzil [name of Iqbal's residence]. Ali Bakhsh [Iqbal's domestic servant] was sitting in the verandah. He told me that now Iqbal was feeling well. He informed Iqbal about our arrival.

We entered Iqbal's room. He thanked Asad and Dr. Selzer and both reciprocated. Dr. Selzer already talked about Iqbal's sickness but after examining him he opined that he was suffering from the disease of extended heart (*itisā-i kalb*) and his throat problem was due to local paralysis.”⁴²

Besides Nazīr Niāzi, Mrs. Doris Ahmad, a German governess of Iqbal's children, also mentions the name of Dr. Selzer among the physicians who were providing medical treatment to Iqbal,⁴³ but she has not referred to Asad in any capacity.

Muhammad Asad and Mawlana Mawdūdi

In 1934, Chaudhry Niāz 'Alī Khan (1880-1976), a retired Assistant Engineer, made an acquaintance with Asad and soon they became intimate friends. The British government had recognized his meritorious services during the First World War and he was decorated with Silver Jubilee Medal in 1935.⁴⁴ Being a fervent Muslim Leaguer, he supported Iqbal and Asad in their struggle for establishing a separate

⁴² See *Iqbāl key Huṣūr* (Memoirs and Recollections) in Urdu. By Sayyid Nazīr Niāzi. 3rd ed., Lahore 2000 (1971), pp. 383-384, 386; also *Iqbālīyyāt Sayyid Nazīr Niāzi*. Ed. by 'Abdullah Shah Hāshmi, Lahore 1996, p. 86.

⁴³ Cf. Doris Ahmad: *Iqbal as I Knew Him*, Lahore 2001 (1986), p. 44.

⁴⁴ See *Nāma-i 'Ā'māl* (Urdu), Vol. II, p. 813, see below, note 73.

homeland for Indian Muslims.

Niāz 'Ali lived in the fruit farm of Fort Jamālpur near Pathānkot, a small village in Gurdāspur district. He intended to establish a *waqf* (endowment) using a piece of land he owned there and wanted to establish a Dāru'l Islam that was to provide leaders to Indian Muslims and to serve as the foundation for a genuine religious movement of political deliverance. Its purpose was to be both an intellectual and political force and an ideal Muslim community whose example would revolutionize Indian politics.⁴⁵

As a patron of Dāru'l Islam, Niāz 'Ali was trying to find a suitable administrator for his *waqf*. He turned first to Asad, possibly on the suggestion of Iqbal who "...regarded education as the first effective means of bringing a Muslim reawakening, favoured establishing a model *dāru'l 'ulūm* in Punjab to lay the foundation of a new Islamic worldviews which would in turn facilitate the creation of a Muslim national homeland."⁴⁶ At the same time, Niāz 'Ali also corresponded with Mawlana Mawdūdi (1903-1979) who was heavily engaged in Hyderabad Deccan in writing and lecturing on Islam. In one of his letters (dated 25 November 1936), Niāz 'Ali writes:

"Mawlana Muhammad Asad, a converted German [Austrian] Muslim, has been recently appointed the editor of a journal "Muslim [Islamic] Culture" published from Hyderabad. He has accepted my offer to work with me. I mentioned your name to him. He respects you from his heart. It is difficult for you to detach from the affairs of Hyderabad but, at least, you can guide us by your useful suggestions. I hope, you will accept the membership of this institution and allow me to include your name in our prospectus."⁴⁷

As mentioned in this letter, Asad was appointed as the editor of a world-known scholarly journal *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad Deccan) after the death of its first editor, Marmaduke Pickthall (d. 1936). Under the special arrangements made by the Nizam of Deccan, he had to shift immediately from Srinagar. Therefore, he apologized to Niāz 'Ali for not

⁴⁵ Seyyed Vali Reza Khan: *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*. New York/Oxford: OUP, 1996, p. 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ See Iqbal, *Daru'l-Islam awr Mawdudi* (Urdu). By As'ad Gilāni, Lahore 1978, pp. 115-116.

taking the responsibility as the overseer of his *waqf*. Nevertheless, he assured the patron of the *waqf* of his cooperation whenever it required. After a few months (in the middle of 1937), Niāz 'Ali extended his invitation to Mawdūdi who had already bought land in Hyderabad Deccan to establish an Islamic institution of his own. On the incessant pressure of Niāz 'Ali, he changed his mind and finally decided to move to Pathānkot. On 3 August 1937, a meeting of the advisory committee of the proposed Dāru'l-Islam was held in Javid Manzil, presided by Iqbal, in which Asad, Sayyid Muhammad Shah and three or four other persons participated. In this gathering Asad, Sayyid Muhammad Shah and Mawdūdi were assigned to write a prospectus of this institution.⁴⁸ In October 1937, Mawdūdi reached Jullundhar and met Niāz 'Ali who took him to Lahore in order to secure Iqbal's blessings and to get the project under way.⁴⁹ Asad was also present at this meeting,⁵⁰ in which Mawdūdi's appointment was confirmed. Iqbal had already met Mawdūdi in 1929 in Hyderabad and the latter regarded him as his "spiritual father".⁵¹ During this meeting, held at Iqbal's residence, he did insist that he [Mawdūdi's] should establish at Pathankot some form of educational institution with a clearly defined curriculum. Mawdūdi accepted Iqbal's scheme and agreed to use the *waqf* to train a number of capable Muslim students and young leaders in Islamic law as well as modern subjects.⁵² In the newly-established governing committee of the Dāru'l Islam Trust, Asad was also included as a member.

Sayyid Nazīr Niāzi, a distinguished Iqbalist and a vigilant observer of all the initial stages of the *waqf*'s establishment, states:

"In 1937, a few months before Iqbal's death, Chaudhry Niāz

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁹ Vali Reza Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵⁰ See Niāz 'Ali's letter to Mawdūdi (3 October 1937) from Fort Jamālpur. He writes:

"As you have written that you will reach by train on 10 October. We will meet there and then proceed to Jamālpur. Asad Sahib and Mawlana Qarshi will be present there. Afterwards, we all will proceed to Lahore for having a meeting with Iqbal and try to take final decision about this institution according to his instructions. Iqbal is taking much pains for this educational enterprise. Now, everything depends on your decision."

(*Khatūt-i Mawdūdi*. Explained and annotated by Rafi'uddin Hāshmi and Salīm Manṣūr Khālid. Vol. II, Lahore 1995, pp. 124-125).

⁵¹ Vali Reza Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁵² Ibid., p. 35.

'Ali came to Javid Manzil (Mayo Road). Allama Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) accompanied him. Chaudhry Sahib inquired about Iqbal's health and then told him that he has established a *waqf* [endowment] named Dāru'l Islam in Jamālpur Fort that aimed at diffusing the religious education and the progress of the Muslims. He desired to seek the guidance of Iqbal in his venture and after consulting him, some religious scholars were to be invited to visit Dāru'l-Islam. Iqbal explained that the religious institutions were numerous and it would be nice if Chaudhry Sahib use the *waqf* differently. Chaudhry Sahib asked for his proposals to make it more useful. Iqbal responded that, in his opinion, the most significant problem for the present Muslim community is to reconstruct Islamic jurisprudence. Now we are deviating fast from the real path of Islam and the reason of this divergence is our political and collective problems which have taken a peculiar form in our age. Our religious scholars must understand these problems and try to harmonize them with the Islamic laws.⁵³ Then another question was raised that it seems difficult for the reputed religious scholars to join Dāru'l-Islam, as they are fully occupied in administering their own centres. Iqbal agreed and expressed the opinion that we can find many such educated young persons who are truly devoted to Islam and completely aware of the contemporary problems. Modern as well as traditional educated personnel are conscious of the present phenomenon and we must try to bring them on one platform. Then, Iqbal, making a sign to Muhammad Asad, said "Look! Here is such a young man sitting and we can depute him to perform this service." Chaudhry Sahib clarified that Asad would definitely cooperate with him but we need a group of people for achieving our goal."⁵⁴

Mawlana Mawdūdi arrived at Pathānkot on 16 March, 1938 and took charge of the Dāru'l-Islam project, patronized by Niāz 'Ali.

⁵³ "It was Iqbal's earnest desire that Allama Muhammad Asad should devote his whole time for the reconstruction of Islam jurisprudence in the light of modern age." (*Iqbal awr Mashāhir*. By Kalīm Akhtar, Lahore 1997, p. 107 "Allama Muhammad Asad awr Allama Muhammad Iqbal").

⁵⁴ See Urdu weekly *Asia* (Lahore), Iqbal Number, 17 April 1969; also in: *Iqbāliyyāt-i Niāzi*, *op. cit.*, p. 103, "Allama Iqbal awr Mawlana Mawdūdi", pp. 103-105.

Though Mawdūdi was not Iqbal's choice to head it, even then he wanted to make it a centre of the Muslim revival in India. The very next month after Mawdūdi's arrival in Pathānkot, Iqbal died (21 April) and he was 'left alone for the uphill task he had decided to undertake jointly'.⁵⁵ Despite his feeling of loneliness, Iqbal's death freed Mawdūdi from the restrictions to which he had acceded in Lahore.⁵⁶ Soon afterwards, Mawdūdi paid more attention to propagate his political agenda instead of paying more attention to the main objectives of the *waqf*. Even Niāz 'Ali disliked the increasing politicization of Dāru'l-Islam and consequently Mawdūdi resigned in January 1939 and proceeded to Lahore.⁵⁷

From the end of 1936 upto 1938, Asad was in Hyderabad Deccan as the editor of *Islamic Culture* but he played a vital role in establishing the Dāru'l-Islam, first as a consultant and then as a member of its governing committee. Apart from this, Asad had very cordial relations with Mawdūdi and ranked him as one of the greatest religious scholars of the Muslim world. In one of his interviews Asad says that:

"Mawdūdi was not only a great Islamic scholar, but also a dear personal friend of many years standing."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Veli Reza Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For the early history of Dāru'l-Islam, see As'ad Gilāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-308 and Veli Reza Nasr, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-39, "The Dāru'l-Islam Project: 1937-1939".

For Chaudhry Niāz 'Ali Khan, see As'ad Gilāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-291. His son, K.M. Azam, has given useful information about his father's friendship with Asad (see his article "Unforgettable Pakistani", included in the present volume).

In his condolence message on Niāz 'Ali's demise (1976), Asad writes (letter from Morocco, dated 19 March 1976):

"His life was a model. He made tremendous efforts for Islam. His struggle, covering more than forty years, is unforgettable... His service for Islam and Pakistan are commendable. His emotional attachment with Iqbal, the establishment of Dāru'l-Islam on his suggestion and his continuous service to Muslims are not easy to forget. Above all, his excellent personality, energetic eagerness for very noble cause, pure passion for Islam and readiness for sacrifice and bestowing will never be forgotten." (cf. As'ad Gilāni, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-279; Asad's English letter is not extant, only Urdu text is available).

⁵⁸ Malise Ruthven: "Muhammad Asad: Ambassador of Islam" (in: *Arabia. The Islamic World Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1981). He often quotes Asad in his book *Islam in the World*, Penguin series (paperback) 1991 (1984).

In a letter written to a friend, Asad admits that:

“In my list of supporters, Mawlana Mawdūdi stands on the top. He played a positive role in saving me and my reputation from the allegations. I was neither member of Jamā't-i Islām nor I agreed with his views. In spite of our intellectual differences, I am pleased to admit that he had a respectable and fair personality.” (Daily *Nawa-i Waqt* (Lahore), Magazine, 28 October 1982)

Mawdūdi also owed to Asad in a same spirit and acknowledged his creditable services for the Islamic revival in a letter (15 Ramazan 1955) written to their common friend, Niāz 'Ali, in the following words:

“I met Muhammad Asad in Hyderabad. I have gone through his *Islam at the Crossroads* and the translation of *Sahih Bukhari*. I think that out of Europe's spoils (*ghanā'im*) Islam has found in Asad a most precious diamond in the modern age. The spirit of Islam has completely penetrated his body and he has served Islam more than other Islamic scholars who have been teaching for the last fifty years. If he is available for your institution, you will be fortunate and I congratulate you. I hope that your idea will definitely be fruitful.”⁵⁹

Later on, Mawdūdi changed his appreciative remarks about Asad's personality and services to Islam. I think that Asad's English translation of the first nine *Sūrah*s of Qur'an was a main cause of his modified opinion about his old friend.⁶⁰ Whatever the reason may be, he adversely remarked about Asad in his letters written to Maryam Jameelah, an American Jewish woman. Before her conversion (24 May 1961) she read Asad's two books (*The Road to Mecca* and *Islam at the*

⁵⁹ Cf. *Khatūt-i Mawdūdi*, *op. cit.*, p. 62. From the last sentence of this letter, it is evident that after Partition (1947) Niāz 'Ali intended to establish a Dāru'l Islam in Jauharābād (where he settled and died) on the same pattern of such institution in Pathānkot and contacted its administrator (e.g. Mawdūdi) and the members of the governing committee (e.g., Asad).

⁶⁰ Published from Muslim World League, Mecca, 1964 (pp. 255). It is said that Mawdūdi was one of the signatories who disapproved Asad's translation and strongly recommended to ban it.

Crossroads) which mentally prepared her to embrace Islam. In her memoirs she writes:

“After *The Road to Mecca*, Muhammad Asad’s little masterpiece *Islam at the Crossroads* has become the foundation of my literary career. The theme of *Islam at the Crossroads* is why Islamic civilization and Western civilization are irreconcilable with each other. Any compromise with the latter, means defeat for the former. As *Islam at the Crossroads* is only a very small book, I intend to greatly enlarge, expand and write much more on the same subject in great detail.”⁶¹

A few months before her conversion to Islam, she corresponded with Mawdūdi, and asked him in one of her letters:

“Have you ever read *Islam at the Crossroads* by Muhammad Asad which takes up this subject [western clothing and clean-shaven] at length?”⁶²

and Mawdūdi replied in detail (25th February 1961) in these words:

“You have asked me about the book, *Islam at the Crossroads*. I have read that book along with other writings by Mr. Muhammad Asad and I had the opportunity of personal acquaintance with him as after accepting Islam, he settled in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. Perhaps you may be interested to know that he is also of (Austrian) Jewish origin. I have great respect for his exposition of Islamic ideas and especially his criticism of Western culture and its materialistic philosophies. I am sorry to say, however, that although in the early days of his conversion, he was a staunch, practicing Muslim, gradually he drifted close to the ways of the so-called “progressive” Muslims first like the “reformed” Jews. Recently his divorce from his Arab wife and marriage to a modern American girl hastened this process of deviation more definitely. Although these melancholy facts cannot be disputed, much has justified, yet I cannot blame him too much for this. At the time we met during the first years after

⁶¹ Maryam Jameelah: *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth in America (1945-1962)*, Lahore 1989, p. 160.

⁶² *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah*. Lahore 1978, p. 9.

his conversion, were welcome and pleasant changes were brought about in his life. But once a man begins to live the life of a true Muslim, all his capabilities lose their "market value". It is the same sad story with Muhammad Asad, who had always been accustomed to a high and modern standard of living and after embracing Islam, had to face the severest financial difficulties. As a result, he was forced to make one compromise after another. Still I hope that despite these adverse changes, his ideals and convictions have not altered even though his practical life has suffered many modifications."⁶³

This letter shattered Maryam Jameelah's feelings about Asad's scholarship and personality and expressed them in her letter (dated 8 March 1961):

"What you said about Muhammad Asad in your last letter shocked and saddened me deeply. I never suspected even from his most recent writings and letters to me that he was not a staunchly observant Muslim. I can never forget that splendid chapter in his book *Islam at the Crossroads*, about the necessity for Muslims to strictly follow the *Sunnah* as well as the Qur'an of Islam is to survive and flourish. His arguments for the authenticity of *Hadith* were so sound and convincing, and his deep feeling for Islam so evident, despite what you told me about his financial difficulties. I cannot help but wonder why he changed. I pray to Allah that such a thing will never happen to me."⁶⁴

Soon after the exchange of these letters, Maryam Jameelah converted to Islam and permanently settled in Lahore. She was, no doubt, deeply impressed by Mawdūdi's writings but Asad's early books and his correspondence introduced her, for the first time, the blessings of Islamic faith.

⁶³ *Correspondence between..... op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Muhammad Asad in Detention Camp (1.9.1939—14.8.1945)

Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in March 1938 and after two months the Nürnberg Laws were enforced. Under the Nazis, the Viennese Jews were treated oppressively and had to face atrocious persecutions, confiscations, pogroms and deportations. These heinous activities of the Nazis worried Asad about his Jewish parents (particularly his father with whom he kept himself in touch until 1942, and stepmother) and wanted to save their lives. He rushed to Vienna and got a visa for entry to England and British India⁶⁵ (April 1939). In London he applied for the extension of his visa.⁶⁶ Nobody knows about the acceptance or refusal of his application but it is certain that he returned to India in the summer of 1939. His incessant efforts for saving his family members failed. In 1942, his parent and a sister were deported from Vienna and perished in the camps.⁶⁷

Germany invaded Poland and England declared war against Germany in September 1939 and one day after this declaration Asad was incarcerated as upto that year he was holding an Austrian passport. About his internment he says:

“...during the Second World War—because of my then Austrian citizenship I found myself an involuntary “guest” of the government of India from September 1, 1939 to 14 August, 1945. Throughout these years I was the only Muslim in an internment camp peopled by some three thousand Germans, Austrians and Italians—both Nazis and anti-Nazis as well as Fascists and anti-Fascists—all of them collected helter-skelter from all over India and indiscriminately locked up behind barbed wire as “enemy aliens”; and the fact that I was the only Muslim among so many non-Muslims contributed, if anything,

⁶⁵ India Office Records, L/P & J/7/2678. Visa for England and British was granted at Vienna (date of issue, 24 April 1939). Authorized by the Government of India in the Delhi, 9 February 1939; see Florence Heymann, *Un Juif pour l'Islam*, Paris: Stock, 2005, pp. 224-225.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Asad's undated note was received at India Office on 8 June 1939. He writes: “I beg you to give me a prolongation of this visa till the end of this year as my parents will come in about 4 to 5 months. I have to settle many things for them.”

⁶⁷ Martin Kramer, *op. cit.*

to the intensity of my preoccupation with the cultural and intellectual problems of my community and the spiritual environment which I had chosen for myself as early as 1926."⁶⁸

In his early days of imprisonment, Asad was alone but afterwards his Arab wife, Munira (d. 1978) and son Ṭalāl Asad⁶⁹ (b. 1932) were allowed to stay with him and transferred to a detention camp for families near Bombay (1941). In an interview, Ṭalāl recollects those days of his childhood in the following words:

"My father was an intellectual type, and not an emotional person. The only time in my life that I remember seeing him actually cry was when he was informed at the end of the war that his father and sister had perished in the death camp. That was the only time he asked me not to join him on his evening stroll, the only time he wanted to be alone."⁷⁰

In 1940, the Government of India constituted an "Aliens' Advisory Committee" (Delhi) under the chairmanship of G. B. Constantine and its main objective was to look after the matters of those foreigners who were imprisoned for certain reasons. Only one member of the Committee⁷¹ was Indian and he was Sir Muhammad Yāmīn Khan (2.9.1886, Meerut—27.3.1966, Karachi).⁷² Alongwith other members of

⁶⁸ M. Asad: *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*. Gibraltar 1987, p. 1, "Author's Note."

⁶⁹ Only son of Asad; he was a professor in the Department of Anthropology in the City University of New York (CUNY). He has written several articles on the Kababish Arabs of Northern Kordofan. His review article on Kedourie's *Afghani and 'Abduh* is significant (in: *Middle East Journal* 2 (1976), pp. 13-22).

Amir Ben-David interviewed him almost a month after the World Trade Centre was destroyed (9 September 2001); cf. "Leopold of Arabia", in: *Ha'artz Magazine* (Tel Aviv), 16 November 2001, pp. 9-15.

In 1984, Ṭalāl visited Paksitan and met his friends and class-mates in Lahore and Islamabad. (cf. Heymann, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285).

⁷⁰ Amir Ben-David's interview.

⁷¹ Other members of this committee were: A. G. Phillips (Inspector-General Police, Ajmer), Lt.-Col. L.G. Hamber (Intelligence Department of British Army) and Hon. Sir David Devdas (Member, Council of State, Rtd. Judge, High Court, Madras).

⁷² See Ahmad Saeed: *Muslim India (1857-1947). A Biographical Dictionary*. 2nd rev. ed., Lahore 2005 (1997), pp. 336-337.

the Committee, he visited Ahmadnagar camp and met Asad. He was examining the applications which the Committee received for his release. In his autobiography (Urdu), he has given useful and little-known information about Asad's life, academic qualifications and Arabian stay.⁷³

“20 December 1940: Yesterday I met Jewish prisoners. Only married people are living in this camp. Mrs. Asad Weiss, an Arab woman, and his son are also here. Asad Weiss, a German/Austrian Jew, was converted to Islam in Berlin and during his stay in Mecca, he married an Arab woman. He is in Ahmadnagar camp of suspected persons. Mrs. Weiss requested to allow her to live with her husband and his son would be properly educated.” (II: 810)

“23 December 1940... Here the most important person is Asad Weiss (Leo Weiss). His is a brilliant person and when he was brought before us and conversed, we all three were deeply impressed by his awe-inspiring knowledge. Our two members, Mr. Phillips and Sir David Devadas, have gone to Madras... They will meet us in Calcutta. Asad Weiss presented an excellent application. He typed it himself. He speaks and writes English better than the English people. The accent of Germans is totally untraceable. He spoke in a real English accent. Several years before the War, he was converted to Islam in Berlin. From there he came to Egypt and then to Mecca. He learnt Arabic and married an Arab woman. Many Indians are his admirers. He wrote a book entitled *Islam at the Crossroads* and now he is translating *Sahih Bukhāri* into English. Nizam of Hyderabad pays him Rs. 200 per month as a special grant so that he can complete his translation of *Bukhāri* in a comfortable environment. Niāz 'Ali Khan,⁷⁴ retired Assistant Engineer, and now drawing Rs. 37.3 as his monthly pension, is his admirer. He owns 500 acres land. In recognition of his commendable services in the First World War, he was decorated with Silver Jubilee Medal in 1935. Now, he lives at a fruit farm of Jamālpur near Pathānkot. He has written that he knows Asad Weiss for

⁷³ *Nāma-i A'māl*, Vol. II, Lahore 1970, pp. 810, 813, 817-819.

⁷⁴ The patron of Dāru'l-Islam Project, see above.

the last six years and guarantees his noble character. He considers his arrest is an impediment in interpreting the Islamic Literature. At present we postponed our decision for him, till the next meeting of the Sub-Committee." (II: 813)

"**1st January 1941:** Niāz 'Ali Khan wrote a letter for the release of Asad Weiss, with the signatures of 1) Nawwāb Sir Muhammad Shah Nawāz Khan of Mamdot, 2) Khan Bahadur Nawwāb Muzaffar Khan C.I.E. (Shahabad), 3) Nawwāb Nisār 'Ali Khan Qizilbāsh (Lahore), 4) Khan Bahadur Malik Muhammad Amin Khan C.I.E. (Shahabad, district Attock), 5) Khan Bahadur Hāji Rahīm Bakhsh, retired Session Judge, 6) Sayyid Muhsin Shah, Advocate, Secretary Arjuman-i Islamia (Lahore) and 7) Khan Sahib Amiruddin, Sub-Registrar (Lahore).

Committee received this letter in which the character of Asad was guaranteed. Another application, signed by 56 dignitaries of Punjab, was also received. Out of these nobles, I personally know the following:

- 1) Shaikh Abdul Qādir, Former Member, Council, Secretary of State,
- 2) Sufi Abdul Hamīd, Member Assembly, Ambala,
- 3) Bashir Ahmad, Amir of Jamā'at-i Ahmadiyya,
- 4) Begum Jahān Āra Shahnawāz,
- 5) Dr. Shaikh Muhammad 'Alam, LL.D.,
- 6) Mr. Ghiyās-ud-Din, MLA (Central),
- 7) Khan Bahadur Sardar Muhammad Habibullah (Lahore),
- 8) Khan Bahadur Ramazan 'Ali, Secretary Punjab Muslim League,
- 9) Malik Barkat 'Ali, Advocate (Lahore),
- 10) Mian Bashir Ahmad, Barrister (Lahore),
- 11) Khan Bahadur Capt. Malik Muzaffar Khan, MLA (Attock),
- 12) Khan Bahadur Maulawi Ghulam Muḥyiuddin, MLA (Lahore),
- 13) Shaikh Sādiq Hasan, MLA (Amritsar)
- 14) Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, MLA (Jhelum)
- 15) Chaudhry Muhammad Yasīn Khan, MLA (Gurgaon)
- 16) Major Sardar Muhammad Nawāz Khan, MLA (Attock)
- 17) Khan Bahadur Nawwāb Sir Muhammad Jamāl Khan
- 18) Nawwāb Sir Muhammad Mihr Shah, MLA (Central)

In another letter the names of Sir Firoz Khan Noon and

Malik Khizr Hayāt Khan have been referred.

According to the Intelligence Police Report, Asad was staying in Srinagar (Kashmir) and waiting for a person who would come from Russia. Another Intelligence report came from Jiddah in which it was stated that a few Muslims met together on the occasion of Haj and talked about some political affairs. Accompanied by some of them, Asad Weiss came from Mecca to Jiddah and arranged for them a meeting with Russian Consul. The names of all these persons are known but cannot be disclosed. Abdul Majīd Sindhi was his closest friend and after coming from Mecca, he stayed with him. I know Abdul Majīd very well. In these days, he is a minister in Sind and often comes to Delhi for participating in Muslim League's processions.

I personally examined the concerned file but could not find Jiddah report. I knew the names of the persons, mentioned in this report. Two persons from Aligarh got immediate permission for going on Haj. They had no intention at all to perform Haj and nobody was expecting it. They were sent to Mecca on government's expenditures and assigned the duty to inform the concerned authorities about those persons who are anti-government and in this year a large number of them went to Hijāz for Haj.

I wrote a note, covering full-scape 38 pages and proposed that we should release Asad Weiss. Sir David Devadas also favoured me. Mr. Phillips and Colonel Hamber were against our opinion. Mr. Constantine also agreed, though Sir Darling, Member Revenue Board, Punjab, opposed. In this file, there was a letter by Asad in which he wrote about his influence on the graduate students of the Punjab University and if he is released, he will try to persuade them to favour the government. This letter changed Mr. Constantine's opinion and said that there was no need for a religious man to interfere in politics. It means that the man is a potential danger. All three English members strongly opposed Asad's release, so he remained in the camp, but it was decided that his wife and son could stay with him." (II: 817-819)

Asad was released soon after the end of war and settled in Dalhousie, a hill station (now in Himachal Pradesh, India). He rented a fine bungalow named Fairview and resided there till the Indian subcontinent was partitioned and a new state, Pakistan, emerged. According to K. M. Azam, an eye-witness, "A large gathering of eager

men assembled at the nearby Sarna Railway Station to receive them [Asad, Munira and Talāl], including Maulana Abu al-A'la Mawdūdī...”

Publications during Asad's Indian Years

i) **Islam at the Crossroads:** As stated above, Iqbal failed to appoint Asad in the Islamia College and thus, he lost for ever the opportunity of becoming a learned teacher of Islamic theology. However, he continued his in-depth study of various aspects of Islam. Soon after his arrival in India, he had been lecturing on the subject of Islam and the Western civilization. Later on, he jotted down all his scattered material and presented it in his first English book entitled *Islam at the Crossroads*. It appeared in 1934 (preface, dated March 1934) from Lahore and Srinagar simultaneously. His first venture into Islamic thought was, in fact, a result of twelve years of profound thinking and penetrating study of contemporary problems of the Muslim *ummah*. Being a European, he had an edge over other critics of Western materialism. He knew all the merits and demerits of these two prominent civilizations and his comparative study is tinged with his positive way of thinking. Undoubtedly, it may be ranked among the best contributions made to the reconstruction of Muslim religious thought. Iqbal, his mentor, opined in these words:

“This work is extremely interesting. I have no doubt that coming as it does from a highly cultured European convert to Islam it will prove an eye-opener to our younger generation.”⁷⁵

Another converted Muslim and translator of Qur'an, Marmaduke Pickthal, reviewed as under:

“Mr. Muhammad Asad has written a book which is a notable contribution to what we may call the literature of Muslim regeneration, and the fact that he is a European by birth and education, a widely travelled and observant man, makes his achievement the more remarkable...It is the most thoughtful and thought-stimulating work on the means of Islamic revival that has appeared since Prince Sa'īd Ḥalīm Pāsha's famous

⁷⁵ Quoted in *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad Deccan), 1937.

‘Islamlashmaq’.”⁷⁶

Basically, this book was written to show:

- i) the fundamental, inherent differences between Islam and Western civilization,
- ii) that an intimation of Western concepts and social ways by the Muslims must inevitably destroy the continuity of Islam as a social programme and a culture producing factor.
- iii) The role of *Sunnah* in the ideological structure of Islam
- iv) That there can be no future for Islam and Muslim society unless we shed the spirit of apology for our religion and culture and derive pride from the fact that our ways of life are different, and must be different, from the ways of the rest of the world.⁷⁷

Like these Muslim savants, many other religious scholars⁷⁸ and distinguished journalists⁷⁹ considered this book an excellent study of the significance of the *Shari‘ah* in the light of the problems that the Muslim world faces in the modern world. Because of its thematic importance, it went through many reprints and editions both in India,⁸⁰ Pakistan⁸¹ and abroad.⁸² Years after its publication this book became the foundation of Margaret Marcus *alias* Maryam Jameelah’s (b. 13 May 1934) literary career⁸³ and influenced her so deeply that she decided to become a Muslim (around 1954).⁸⁴ Like the author, she also belonged to a Jewish family in New Rochelle, New York, and embraced Islam on 24 May

⁷⁶ *Islamic Culture*, October 1934.

⁷⁷ Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi, in: *Ma‘arif* (Azamgarh), October 1934.

⁷⁸ *Arafat* (Dalhousie), Vol. I. no. 9 (July 1947).

⁷⁹ *Inqilab*, 28 April 1934.

⁸⁰ 1st ed. (April 1934), 2nd ed. (June 1934), 3rd ed. (July 1937), 4th ed. (October 1941), 5th ed. (January 1947), 6th rev. ed. from M. Ashraf Dar, Orientalia. All these editions were published from Lahore.

⁸¹ Seventh ed., Lahore: Arafat Publications, Umerdeen Road, Wassanpura, 1955, pp. 160 and afterwards published frequently.

⁸² Fourteenth rev. ed., Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982 in which Asad has added and changed some of his footnotes.

⁸³ See her *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth in America*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ Cf. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World*. Edited by John L. Esposito *et al*, New York: OUP, Vol. 3 (1995), s. v. Jameelah, Maryam, by Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr.

1961. In one of her letters, she confesses that:

“I can never forget that splendid chapter in his book *Islam at the Crossroads*, about the necessity for Muslims to strictly follow the Sunnah as well as the Qur'an if Islam is to survive and flourish.”⁸⁵

ii) **Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam.** Among Muslim 'ulema' and European Islamicists, the credit of translating any collection of *ahādith* (Sayings of the Holy Prophet) into English goes to Muhammad Asad. Under the spiritual atmosphere of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, the idea of translating *Sahih al-Bukhari*, one of the most important collections of *ahādith* of the 3rd/9th century, occurred to him.⁸⁶ Furthermore, his close links with some influential members of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia encouraged him and assured him to provide funds for its completion. Primarily, Asad planned to publish this translation in eight volumes (consisting of forty parts), followed by an index, but only five installments of the fifth volume appeared between December 1935 and May 1938. The first setback to his mammoth project was that he left Saudi Arabia and came to India where he was involved in different 'secret' affairs. In the early period of his Indian stay, he established close relations with the prominent leaders of Ahl-i Hadith who emphasized more on Prophetic Traditions than other religious groups. Asad took an active part in the politico-religious activities of Ahl-i Hadith 'ulema' who also pressurized him to restart his translation of *Sahih*. As reported in a local newspaper, Asad stayed in Srinagar and devoted most of his time in this translation which was near completion. His intention was to publish, at least, one of its parts every month.⁸⁷ The Nizam of Hyderabad state ordered to send him Rs. 200 per month so that he could complete his work as early as possible.⁸⁸ Asad's "spiritual father", Muhammad Iqbal, also encouraged him to

⁸⁵ Cf. *Correspondence between....., op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸⁶ “The idea of translating this occurred to me during my five years' sojourn at al-Madinah where I was studying Traditions in the Prophet's Mosque.” (Introduction, December 1935).

⁸⁷ *Inqilāb*, 26 October 1934. The editor of this newspaper also appealed for the subscription of Asad's undertaking. (Cf. *Inqilāb*, 31 May 1935, Editorial).

⁸⁸ Cf. Sir Muhammad Yāmīn Khan's autobiography *Nāma-i A'māl*, vol. II, see above. With the prior approval of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Asad dedicated his translation to him (Cf. *Inqilāb*, 18 October 1936).

continue his work, as he disliked the criticism of Western orientalists (such as Ignaz Goldziher) about the authenticity of Hadith literature. Asad himself admits:

“I should have added to this volume a brief Introduction dealing with the history and the codification of Hadith; but, in the course of a talk we had on this subject, the great Muslim poet-philosopher, Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, emphatically pointed out to me the necessity of a more elaborate treatise which would serve not only as an introduction to the study of Traditions as such, but also as a new philosophical valuation of Traditions in the conceptual structure of Islam. The necessity of such a work had already been clearly demonstrated in Sir Iqbal’s eminently valuable “Lectures on the Reconstruction of Muslim Religious Thought”; and his direct suggestions appealed to me at once. I began working on this subject early this year, and the material soon grew to very considerable dimensions.”⁸⁹

He also owed his indebtedness to an Indian scholar who helped him in his venture. He says:

“I shall not conclude these lines without expressing my thanks to my friend, Maulana ‘Atā’ ar-Raḥmān Hoshiārpuri ar-Raḥmāni, for his invaluable help in elucidating some of the technical intricacies of this work and his practical advice at a time when the burden of this undertaking almost overwhelmed me.”⁹⁰

The fifth instalment of his projected translation came out in May 1938 and then certain unpropitious circumstances impeded his work. During his internment period, he continued his translation with dexterity but afterwards all his hand-written material was lost. In the preface of *Sahih*’s new edition (1981) he describes:

“The outbreak of the Second World War interrupted the publication. Just as it was about to be resumed, in the summer of 1947, the chaos and the inter-religious holocaust which

⁸⁹ *Sahih Bukhari*, Srinagar 1935, preface.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

followed upon the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the establishment of Pakistan...resulted in a great personal loss—to me as to so many others. Since the end of war I had been living in the eastern (now Indian) part of the Punjab; and at the outbreak of the partition troubles the manuscripts of nearly three-quarters of my annotated translation of the *Sahih* were barbarically destroyed. With my own eyes I saw a few scattered leaves of those manuscripts floating down the river Ravi in the midst of torn Arabic books—the remnants of my library—and all manner of debris; and with those poor, floating pieces of paper vanished beyond recall more than ten years of intensive labour.”

Asad was a strong-willed person and he was not disappointed by his labour's loss. He commenced the translation of *Sahih* when he was sitting in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. This loss took him from there to Mecca and spared all his energy, capabilities and time to complete his dreamed-of translation and commentary of the Holy Qur'an. In his own words: "...I realized with growing conviction that the ten years spent on analyzing, translating and clarifying the *Sahih* were a God-willed preparation for a work which for a very long time had represented an enticing dream to me: a new rendering into English of the message of the Holy Qur'an..."⁹¹

Later on, a voluminous English translation of *Sahih* was published⁹² but Asad was the forerunner of translating into English any collection of *ahādith*. According to a reviewer, Asad's "narrative is so vivid and the distant past is so well animated on these pages, that it seems as if the Holy Prophet and his Companions were living and breathing today."⁹³

iii) Islamic Culture. Nizam of Hyderabad State was one of the admirers of Asad's scholarship and when he came to know about the commencement of his project of translating *Sahih* into English (1934), he soon sponsored it and fixed a monthly stipend of two hundred rupees. Again, when Asad was released from the detention camp in

⁹¹ Ibid., new ed., 1981, preface.

⁹² The standard Arabic-English version is the translation in nine volumes by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Chicago/Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1976.

⁹³ Maryam Jameelah, in: *Muslim World Book Review*, 3/3 (1983), p. 4.

1945, he came to Dalhousie with his family for restarting his academic career. In those days, he was facing financial problems and for his new venture he was in dire need of funds. Therefore, he "had to sell his press. This was bought by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Three of Nizam's officials came to Jamālpur to seal the deal. Muhammad Asad called me and Ṭalāl to show us their bank cheque, which was for 20,000 rupees, a large sum of money in those days."⁹⁴

In 1927, a widely-known quarterly journal named *Islamic Culture* appeared from Hyderabad Deccan under the editorship of a converted British Muslim—Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936). Its aim was to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the Muslim culture in its various aspects and the appreciation not only from the Muslims, but also from the steadily growing circle of European orientalists. Because of the failing health, Pickthall had to leave India in 1935⁹⁵ and in the beginning of next year he died.⁹⁶

Muhammad Asad, also a converted European Muslim, was a most suitable scholar to be appointed as the editor of *Islamic Culture*. Exactly after a decade of its publication, it was officially announced that "from January 1937, the *Islamic Culture* will be edited by Mr. Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss), already known to the public through his translation of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and other works on Islamic subjects."⁹⁷ Under the name of "Muhammad Asad-Weiss", he not only edited but also contributed to this journal.⁹⁸ During his editorship of about two

⁹⁴ K. M. Azam's article, see above.

⁹⁵ *Inqilāb*, 25 January 1925.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1935; see also "Marmaduke William Pickthall" by Muriel Pickthall, in: *Islamic Culture*, October 1937, pp. 138-142 and Peter Clark: *Marmaduke Pickthall—British Muslim*. London: Quartet Books, 1986.

Nizamāt Jang (of Hyderabad) paid a tribute to Pickthall in a poem:

Soldier of faith! True Servant of Islam!
To thee 'twas given to quit the shades of night
And onward move, aye onward into light
With soul undaunted, heart assured and claim.

⁹⁷ *Islamic Culture*, October 1936, p. 673.

⁹⁸ During his editorship of *Islamic Culture* (1937-1938), only two articles were published in this journal: "Towards a Resurrection of Thought" (11 (1937), pp. 7-16) and "Pages from Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī" (1938, pp. 98-107). Information about the publication of a part of *Saḥīḥ* (Arafat Publications, Model Town, Lahore) was also given in almost every issue of this journal (1938).

years, he attempted to widen the scope of *Islamic Culture*, so as to make it still more representative of the cultural course for which it came out. He concentrated more on the research into the intellectual and historical foundations of the Islamic past. He also provided a line of investigation into the different ways of thought existing in the Islamic World and endeavoured to arrive at a philosophical valuation of the dynamic elements of the Islamic culture and of the possibility they offer for the future development. Besides, Asad changed the outward appearance of this journal and took some steps for its typographical improvements.

In 1938, some political upheavals occurred in Europe and he had to resign from the editorship of *Islamic Culture* and prompted to go to Vienna.

iv) Arafat: Asad started his academic career from journalism. As a correspondent to the Middle Eastern Islamic countries, he served well-known German, Swiss and Dutch newspapers.⁹⁹ His reports, assessments and general contributions about the various contemporary affairs are very informative, analytical and comprehensive.¹⁰⁰ After his conversion (first in Berlin and then in Cairo), he arrived in Saudi Arabia where he spent a few years. According to an Arabic report of Dr. Abdullah Damluji, an Iraqi in Ibn Saud's service, "his apparent purpose is to obtain news from the King, and especially from Shaykh Yusuf Yasin, secretary to the King. Asadullah [Muhammad Asad] uses this news to produce articles for some German and Austrian newspapers, in reply to the distasteful things written by some European newspapers on the Hijazi-Najdi court."¹⁰¹

From Saudi Arabia, Asad came to India in late 1932 and was involved in different politico-religious activities. Soon he adjusted himself with the circumstantial situation of contemporary Indian affairs and he started thinking to publish a journal of his own. It is evident from Iqbal's letter, written to Nazir Niāzi, that in 1934 he had made all necessary arrangements for launching a new journal¹⁰² but due to certain reasons it could not come out. Finally, one year after his release from the detention camp, he succeeded in bringing out a monthly journal from Dalhousie (1946) where he settled with his family. It was entitled

⁹⁹ See Asad's Life: Chronologically arranged.

¹⁰⁰ See Bibliography of Asad's writings.

¹⁰¹ See Martin Kramer's article, with note 17.

¹⁰² "If he intends to issue his proposed journal, it would be possible to increase his income." (Letter dated 30 July 1934; see above).

Arafat and he has himself enumerated the reasons of its name in the first issue as such:

“I have called this review *Arafat* for three reasons. It is on the plain of ‘*Arafāt* (or ‘*Arafah*) that the yearly congregation of Muslims, clad in the all-levelling pilgrims’ garb, became truly the symbol of an *ummah*, a community in which there are no differences of race, nation, so social function; no differences of sect or “school of thought”; a community, in short, of Muslims without any qualifying adjective. Secondly, the pilgrims’ meeting on the plain of ‘*Arafāt* has been likened by our Prophet (upon whom be blessing and peace) to that greater meeting on Resurrection Day when every soul will await the Judgment and in the meantime will try to render account to itself about its doings, in the world: and the Muslims of today need such a reminder more than anything else: because they need self-criticism more than anything else. And, thirdly, it was at ‘*Arafāt*, during the Prophet’s Farewell Pilgrimage, that the words are revealed: “Today I have perfected for you your religion, and fulfilled My favour unto you, and willed that Islam should be your religion” (*surāh* 5:3)—an eternal reminder to us that we need only the Qur’an and the Sunnah, *and nothing else*, to know what Islam is.”¹⁰³

• *Arafat* was a ‘journalistic monologue’ and its nine numbers, published from Dalhousie (September 1946 to July 1947) were written by Asad single-handedly. It was his private venture and he used it as a vehicle for his own conclusions, as he believed that it ‘will be more fruitful to present to the Muslim public a coherent, if tentative, picture of one man’s impressions than to give them a multitude of views, possibly conflicting with another, and certainly proposing widely different steps for our future.’¹⁰⁴

This one man’s journal was a humble contribution to a revival of Muslim thought. Primarily, it addressed to those Muslims who were fully conscious of the contemporary problems, facing the whole Islamic world and desired to pull out the Islamic civilization from its desperate crisis. The editor clearly expressed his views about the establishment of

¹⁰³ *Arafat*, Vol. I, No. 1 (September 1946), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

an Islamic state—an ideal for which he had been struggling for the last two decades.

Though Asad was the sole contributor to *Arafat*, he employed a competent person who looked after its production and circulation. One of his close associates recollects his young days and writes:

“After my matriculation examination in the summer of 1947, I was sent to live with the Asads to learn some manners, rustic that I was. Muhammad Asad restarted [started] his Islamic quarterly [monthly] *Arafat*. He used to work on it all day long. If my and Talāl antics got out of hand, he used growl from his study like a tiger. Muhammad Asad had hired a German, a keen mountaineer and photographer, Mr. Krennik, who used to double as Talāl's tutor and *Arafat's* production and circulation manager.”¹⁰⁵

Arafat was circulated from Dalhousie but it was printed from Lahore (Lion Press). Upto its sixth number, one cannot find anything except Asad's articles on various subjects including his detailed contribution under the title *This Law of Ours*.¹⁰⁶ From its seventh number (April 1947) onwards, he added a section of 'Questions and Answers' or "Correspondence" in which he tried to elaborate his specific views in order to satisfy his readers. During the tumultuous days of Partition (1947), *Arafat* was shifted from Dalhousie to Lahore with its learned editor. After a stoppage of a few months, it was restarted but not as his own venture but as a spokesman of a new institution, established by the Punjab Government. He himself explains:

“The tremendous possibilities of new life that have now opened out before the Muslim Millat in this country seemed to demand that *Arafat* should start its campaign for a practical revival of Islam with renewed vigour; and, in result, our journal begins its new career as an organ of the recently established Department of Islamic Reconstruction, of which the present Editor has the honour of being in charge. As the readers will see elsewhere in

¹⁰⁵ K. M. Azam's article, see above.

¹⁰⁶ Five years before Asad's death (1992), he published a collection of his selective articles entitled *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar, 1987) in which he has included this article but with many alterations in the style and contents. In the present volume its original text has been reproduced.

this issue, the aims and objectives of this Department are exactly the same as those for which *Arafat* was struggling during the private phase of its existence—with the difference only that the birth of Pakistan makes it now possible to try and translate some of our theories into practice.”¹⁰⁷

Now *Arafat* was not a monthly but a quarterly and it was published in English and in Urdu as well (printed from Ripon Press). The Urdu version of the first issue had been delayed because its Naskh type arrived rather late. Some of its articles are also available separately in a booklet form. The first issue (March 1948) was quarterly but the editor’s intention was “that from next year onwards it will be published as a monthly. Because of this reorganization of *Arafat* on more comprehensive lines, and because its voice is now the voice of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction, it has been decided to treat this journal, technically, as a new entity and to number the issues accordingly.”¹⁰⁸

But nothing happened on the lines that Asad had visualized. No other issue of *Arafat* came out and soon the Department of Islamic Reconstruction was closed down. Asad packed his luggage, took his family and departed the newly established state—Pakistan. For a few years, he served this country in different capacities but never thought of settling here permanently.

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¹⁰⁷ *Arafat*, (Lahore), March 1948, pp. 4-5, “Introducing Ourselves”.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

II

STUDIES: APPRECIATION, EVALUATION AND CRITICISM

RASHID AHMAD (JULLUNDHRI)

THE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN

A New Translation with Explanatory Notes¹

The Qur'an is a unique book as far as originality is concerned. This fact is recognized even by those who do not consider it a divine book. On the other hand, the Qur'an is perhaps the only book among the sacred books of the world whose message has been misinterpreted. It is a matter for regret that the greater part of the responsibility lies with the Muslims themselves. They have not succeeded in producing a single standard work on the Qur'an in the English language. The English translations made by some Western scholars have proved to be unsatisfactory. One of the reasons for their failure is that their authors had recourse only to dictionaries and to a few Arabic books. Essential qualities such as a taste for Arabic poetry, a command of Arabic literature, and a knowledge of the circumstances in which the Qur'an was revealed were rare among translators. So the literary beauty of the Qur'an, which had moved the hearts of its first listeners, and the freshness of the divine message were lost. The peoples were deprived of "The Glorious Koran, that inimitable of symphony, the very sounds which move men to tears and ecstasy". In the course of time, when international circumstances and improved communications brought the peoples of the world face to face, and religious misunderstandings were to some degree removed by new thought, some sincere efforts were made to study the Qur'an. The translation: *The Koran Interpreted*, by A.J. Arberry (London, 1955), and *The Holy Koran*, an introduction (London, 1953), were the most impressive contributions towards an understanding of the Qur'an ever to appear in the English language. While Islamic studies were being pursued seriously by Western scholars,² Muslim

¹ This book review was published in the *Islamic Quarterly*, July-September 1968, London.

² See (a) Fazlur Rahman: "Some Recent Books on the Qur'an by Western Authors", in the *Journal of Religion* (vol. 64. no. 1, January, 1984.) USA.

b) Cragg, K.: *The Pen and the Faith* (London, 1985) pp. 25-31. Writing on the

religious institutions were indulging in their century-old meaningless dialectical discussions. Signs of anxiety were seen in some Muslim circles when the gravity of the situation reached its peak. In 1935 the University of al-Azhar in Cairo decided to translate the Qur'an into foreign languages. A committee was set up for this task and it was decided to work on the following lines:

1. The technical terms (which were the product of dialectical discussions in the second century of *Hijra*) would not be allowed to penetrate into the translation.
2. Scientific or astronomical opinions would not be discussed and the translation would be rendered in the light of linguistic rules.
3. No particular school of Muslim thought would be followed. The translation would be made in such a way that it would convey the spirit of the Qur'an to its readers. Interpretation of the verses concerning the miracles would be done according to their own context.

Though, unfortunately, a translation was never made on these lines, the Committee's decision at least put an end to the old controversy about the legitimacy of translation. Renowned scholars such as Shaikh al-Marāghi and Shaikh Shaltūt wrote articles on the necessity for translation. They accepted the *Hanafi* view on the legitimacy of translation. They even went further and said that the opposition to translation on religious grounds was baseless. It is matter for regret that Azhar University utterly failed to put its own decision into effect.

On the other hand, some individual efforts were made in this field by certain scholars of Indo-Pakistan. Muhammad 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, and M. Pickthall, an English Muslim, made annotated translations which enjoyed a good circulation. But the tasks of translation and commentary require a scholar whose literary taste has been developed by staying among the Arabs. True, the literary and rhetorical beauty of the Qur'an cannot be conveyed, its obvious meaning can be rendered in English. Writing on the difficulty of Qur'anic translation, Arberry says: 'Having spent many years in studying the problems of translation, I know all too well that, within my own

Tarjuman-ul Qur'an by Mawlana Azād, Cragg considers it "one of the most celebrated in this century". See also Cragg's *Readings in the Qur'an*. (London 1988).

c) Of several English translations, one cited most often in this book is A.J. Arberry's translation.

experience, no piece of fine writing has ever been done full justice to in any translation. The Koran undeniably abounds in fine writing; it has its own extremely individual qualities; the language is highly idiomatic, yet for the most part delusively simple; the rhythms and rhymes are inseparable features of its impressive eloquence, and these are indeed inimitable."

This is the reason why we have said that the task of Qur'anic translation is a most difficult one. A literal translation, word for word, spoils the beauty of the language as well as the spirit of the divine message. For example, condemning both miserliness and extravagance, the Qur'an says:

(Q. 17:29) وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ

The literal translation, as it appears in an English version, runs: 'And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck.' An English reader wonders what is meant by this. Even in the Prophet's lifetime, 'Adi b. Hātim took the verse of the Qur'an 2: 187, in its literal meaning: He took two threads, one white and one black, and hoped that white would turn into black to tell him when dawn had come. Later he was told by the Prophet that he had misunderstood the Qur'anic verse by sticking to its literal meaning.

In addition, the task of the translation is made more difficult by the fact that commentators have included stories of Jewish origin in their works, and it is difficult for the translator to avoid being influenced by them.

It gives us great pleasure to say that a new translation with explanatory notes has appeared.¹ It is a happy coincidence that Mecca, which has the honour of being the first witness of the divine revelation, published this work. The translator Muhammad Asad is known in literary circles for his distinguished qualities. By living among the Arabs for many years he had matured his taste for the Arabic literature. Since he was born into a Jewish family, he is familiar with the stories of Jewish origin. As we have explained earlier, the literal translation of the Qur'an, particularly the translation of its idiomatic and metaphorical verses, not only spoils its literary beauty but also destroys its meaning. Knowing this fact, Asad has successfully avoided the serious errors which other translators have made. In Asad's translation metaphors or similes were not taken strictly in their literal translation. By doing so he tried to preserve the true meaning of the idiomatic phrases.

¹ This book: *The Message of the Qur'an*, is published by Muslim World League, Mecca, 1964. pp. 255.

In addition, in the explanatory notes he has rejected the stories of Jewish origin which have always been one of the main obstacles to the comprehension of the Qur'an. Let us first examine his translations, then the notes.

The sentence; *sūqita fī yadīhi* in Arabic usage means repentance. Relating the story of the Jewish people, how they had gone astray by worshipping the golden calf and their subsequent realization of their own bad action, the Qur'an says: (ولما سقط في أيديهم وراوا أنهم قد ضلوا) 'When they would smite their hands in remorse, having perceived that they had gone astray' (7:149). Arberry's translation runs as follows: 'And when they smote their hands and saw that they had gone astray.' But Yusuf 'Ali's translation runs: "When they repented, and saw that they had erred". True 'Ali's English version is correct, but not acute, because he cared little for *majāz*.

The word *Tā'ir* in Arabic can mean 'fortune' as well as 'bird'. Describing the attitude of Moses' opponents, the Qur'an says that they used to put the blame for their misfortunes on Moses and on his companions. Refuting their belief, the Qur'an says: 'Oh verily their destiny had been decreed by God but most of them knew it not' (7:131). On the other hand Yusuf 'Ali has: 'In truth the omens of evil are theirs in God's sight.' Needless to say that Ali's translation of *majāz* (انما طائرهم) is more appropriate than Asad's one.

The mystery of free will and predestination has always been an important question for theologians. The subject of the Qur'an is man and how he can achieve happiness, and it records the stages through which he passes in his lifetime. However, what is understood from the Qur'an is that man is free in his actions, because he is made in the image of God, while at the same time he is subject to fate because he is not God. He knows all too well his own weakness and the limitations of his free will. But man's responsibility for his own actions, and the whole concept of prophethood as we find it in the Qur'an, both support the idea of free will. So the Qur'anic verses, although they may appear to be ambiguous in their obvious meanings, should be understood and translated in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'anic message. Describing the opponents of the Prophet, the Qur'an says that they will never accept his call to faith. If their unbelief is the result of God's Will, then what is the significance of the divine message? Why should they be held responsible for their unbelief? Asad's translation has given the answer: 'Behold! As for those who are bent on denying the truth, it is all one to them whether thou warnest them or does not warn them: they

will not believe' (2:6). The translation of the verse: as 'those who are bent on denying the truth' conveys what is meant by unbelievers. This makes it clear that it is not God's desire to impose His Will on some people so that they remain unbelievers, but it is they who by denying the truth constantly have reached a point from where there is no return. A literal translation of the verse does not give the true meaning.

As we have said, man is not God and it is beyond his intellectual capacity to have a full knowledge of the universe. But at the same time it would be very unwise for him to deny the universal facts which are beyond the reach of his perception. Describing the Muslim attitude on this point, the Qur'an says: 'Who (Muslims) believe in the Unseen'. The phrase: 'Who believe in the Unseen' is rendered here as follows: 'Who believe in (the existence of) that which is beyond the reach of human perception' (Q.2:3). The difference between the literal translation 'Unseen' and 'that which is beyond the reach of human perception' needs no further comment.

It must be noted that mere translation of the Qur'an does not help the common reader to comprehend fully its teaching. Explanatory notes, therefore, are necessary, particularly in these days when intellectuals, who are sincerely seeking for truth and for ways to solve human problems, have a low opinion about religion. Asad's notes are very satisfactory. Let us examine them.

Western society is deeply concerned about the social problems created by gambling, drinking, and organized crimes. Now is a good time to put forward the claim that the Islamic social system is the best one. In order to protect society from professional robbers, the Qur'an says: 'Now as for the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off the hand of either of them in requital for what they have wrought as a deterrent ordained by God.' True, the Qur'anic punishment for a thief appears at first sight to be very severe, but one can only appreciate its value if one takes into consideration both the conditions under which it is to be carried out and also the gravity of the problems created by professional robbery in present-day society. Writing on this verse Yusuf 'Ali says: "The Canon Law Jurists are not unanimous as to the value of the property stolen, which would invoke the penalty of the cutting off of the hand. The majority hold that petty thefts are exempt from this punishment. The general opinion is that only one hand should be cut off for the first theft, on the principle that "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee," Matt. 18:8. Apparently in the age of Jesus thieves were crucified."

Yusuf 'Ali's note is entirely unsatisfactory. Explaining the background of this punishment Asad says: "The extreme severity of the Qur'anic punishment can be understood only if one bears in mind the fundamental principle of Islamic law that no duty (*taklif*) is ever imposed on man without his being granted a corresponding right (*haqq*), ...consequently, the social legislation of Islam aims at a state of affairs in which every man, woman and child has (a) enough to eat and to wear, (b) an adequate home, (c) equal opportunities and facilities for education, and (d) free medical care in health and in sickness... It is against the background of this social security scheme envisaged by Islam that the Qur'an imposes the severe sentence of hand cutting as a deterrent punishment for robbery...if the society is unable to fulfil its duties with regard to every one of its members, it has no right to invoke the full sanction of criminal law (*hadd*) against the individual transgressor, but must confine itself to milder forms of administrative punishment." This long note may convince the reader of the fairness of the punishment described by the Qur'an.

It is ironic that religion has itself been one of the issues which has divided human society into rival groups which are constantly quarrelling with one another. Every religion claims to be the only true religion. If we accept these claims, we may well declare that there is no truth and that every religion is a false religion. But Islam makes no such claim. Man is successful if he believes in the truth, lives with the truth and leads a righteous life. On this point the Qur'an says: 'Verily, those who believe (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve' (2:62).

Yusuf 'Ali's note on this verse is as follows: "The point of the verse is that Islam does not preach an exclusive doctrine, and is not meant exclusively for one people. The Jews claimed this for themselves, and the Christians in their origin were a sect of the Jews. Even the modern organized Christian churches, though they have been, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by the Time-spirit [*Zeitgeist*], including the historical fact of Islam, yet cling to the idea of Vicarious Atonement, which means that all who do not believe in it or who lived previously to the death of Christ are at a disadvantage spiritually before the Throne of God. The attitude of Islam is entirely different. Islam existed before the preaching of Muhammad on this earth. The Qur'an

expressly calls Abraham a Muslim (3:67). Its teaching (submission to God's will) has been and will be the teaching of religion for all time and for all peoples.' (vol. i, p. 34).

Writing on the same verse, Asad says: "The above passage which recurs in the Qur'an several times—lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of 'Salvation' is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgement and righteous action in life. The statement of this doctrine at this juncture — that is in the midst of an appeal to the children of Israel—is warranted by the false Jewish belief that their descent from Abraham entitles them to be regarded as 'God's chosen people'."

Asad made it clear that Islam is a restatement of what has always been true. Belief in God and righteous life are the essence of religion. Religious dogmas relating to concepts which are beyond the capacities of human perception have no place in Islam.

The story of Jesus Christ, whose mysterious birth and death is one of the most controversial questions, has been revealed in the Qur'an. The great personalities of Jesus and his mother have been described in the Qur'an in such a way that the reader appreciates the beauty of expression and nobility of the message.

Writing on the verse "They (the Jews) did not slay him (Jesus) and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them (as if it had been) so" (4:157). The classical commentators hold the view that someone else was substituted for Jesus prior to the crucifixion and Jesus himself was taken up to heaven bodily. So if Jesus was not crucified, who else was substituted in his place and where did he die? On these points the Qur'an does not make any statement. But in later days Muslim commentators writing on this verse added many stories of Jewish or Christian origin. They accepted the idea that it was a substitute who was crucified on the cross. Yusuf 'Ali says:... "The Qu'ranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies; that disputations, doubts and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to God" (vol. i, p. 230).

Yusuf 'Ali's note does not give a clear description of Jesus' fate. On the other hand, Asad says: "Thus the Qur'an categorically denies the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for

Jesus a person closely resembling him... who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Qur'an or in authentic traditions, and the stories produced in this connection by the classical commentators of the Qur'an must be summarily rejected and this legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it... This, to my mind, is the only satisfactory explanation of the phrase *wa-lakin subbiha lahum..*" (p. 177).

Here it has to be noted that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad 'Ali both held the opinion that the crucifixion itself did not cause the death of Jesus. They believed that he was taken down from the cross before his final death. This opinion goes against the clear statement of the Qur'an. The Qur'an says: 'I (God) prevented the children of Israel from harming thee, when thou earnest unto them with all the evidence of the truth...' (Q.4:110). If Jesus suffered on the cross, though he did not die, as they claimed, then what is the significance of the verse? With regard to his death, the Qur'an does not lay any stress on this point, because the fact that every mortal is subject to death is known to everyone. But the Qur'anic denial of the Jews' claim that they had killed Jesus, and the Qur'anic phrase 'He raised him (Jesus) to Him' were taken by the classical commentators to mean that Jesus had been taken up bodily. Yusuf 'Ali's note concerning this question is no more than what is accepted in traditional circles. Refuting the idea of Jesus' bodily resurrection, Asad says: "Nowhere in the Qur'an is there any warrant for the popular belief that God had "taken up" Jesus bodily, in his life time, into heaven." Though the dialectical discussions to be found in *Tafsir* literature are mainly worthless, the mystery of the last days of Jesus is a historical question which has been constantly raised for centuries, and it is therefore necessary for the commentator to shed some light on this complicated point. Asad's note does this. Anyone eager to obtain further information about the subject may consult the *al-Fatāwa* by the late Shaikh Muhammad Shaltūt. He, and also Abul Kalām Azād, held the opinion that Jesus had passed away. It has to be noted that the *Ikhwān-us-Şafā'* school held the view that Jesus was crucified. It seems that this school took the above-mentioned verse in a metaphorical sense. It means that Jesus' enemies have failed to crush his message. They, in fact, did not realize the significance of his sacrifice. Consequently they became confused of what had happened.

It may be of some interest to readers to know that Qāḍi 'Abdul Jabbar, the celebrated Mu'tazilite theologian and commentator, says that

Jesus, accompanied by his mother, was standing among the people who watched the crucifixion of the poor man who was wrongly put to death by the Jews. Furthermore, this poor man, dying on the cross, saw Mary and cried pointing to Jesus, "This is your son". Hearing this cry Mary took her son and disappeared from the crowd.

Regarding the healing of the sick by Jesus and his other miracles, these are confirmed by the Qur'an. The stories of the 'clay birds' and the healing of the blind and the lepers have been accepted by the classical commentators as statements of facts. Some Sufi commentators like 'Abdur Razzāq al-Qāshāni, however, interpreted the verses metaphorically. Thus the story of the 'clay birds' means: 'By purification and divine wisdom, I (Jesus) will create out of your humble defective souls a soul soaring on the divine horizon, and I will breathe into it divine knowledge so that it will be a living soul'. The healing of the blind and lepers and the bringing back of the dead to life have also been interpreted in the sense of spiritual healing. Writing on the verse about the 'clay birds' Yusuf 'Ali says: 'This miracle of the clay birds is found in some of the apocryphal gospels'. Asad, on the other hand, takes the verse as a parable. The translation is as follows: 'I shall fashion for you out of clay as it were, the shape of (your) destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become (your) destiny by God's leave, and I shall heal the blind ..and the lepers'...' In his explanatory note Asad says: 'In pre-Islamic usage, as well as in the Qur'an, the word *Tā'ir* or *Tayr* often denotes fortune or destiny, whether good or evil... Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny.'

Asad's point of view on the subject is not new. It is true that the message behind the story of the 'clay birds' is that which was expressed in the beginning by Qāshāni, but this message would be the same even if the verse is to be taken in its obvious meaning. The opinion held by Qāshāni was that the statements made in the verse were to be taken literally and also at the same time metaphorically. The following are some reservations on Asad's translation:

- I. It is hard to translate the word *Tair* as used in this verse as 'destiny'. The structure of the sentence does not allow it. The presence of the verbs 'to fashion', 'to breathe', and 'to be' rule out *majāz*.
- II. Jesus was described by his opponents as a sorcerer. One wonders what was the justification for this, if his miracles

were merely spiritual miracles.

- III. Jesus' first listeners were common people and villagers. It would be difficult to claim, therefore, that he employed highly idiomatic language.
- IV. Even by 1922 a study called "Miracles and the New Psychology" was able to declare that in the Gospels the particulars of the miracles of healing upon which most reliance can be placed are not themselves incompatible with the view that such healing was accomplished through the agency of ascertainable psychological laws. In other words, the healing miracles of Jesus were not merely of the spirit but were of both soul and body.

On these grounds we therefore suggest that the verses concerning the healing of the sick, the lepers, and the blind should be interpreted in both ways. 'In other words, the healing miracles of Jesus were not merely of the spirit but were of both soul and body.'

Looking deeply into these few examples, we can judge the value of this translation and notes. The work, we are sure, will be appreciated by students of the Qur'an, as well as by those who are in search of the Islamic faith.

Both Asad and the Islamic League of Mecca deserve our praise for this work. This article would be incomplete if we fail to put forward some suggestions concerning the subject of translation:

1. The Arabic text of the Qur'an should be printed with the English translation. It was a matter of surprise to find that the Islamic League had printed an English version of the Qur'an separate from the original.
2. Maps of historical places associated with the Qur'anic stories such as those of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets should be given.
3. A brief summary of each chapter may be given at the beginning of every chapter.
4. A sketch of the Prophet's life is necessary at the beginning of the book.

We have learnt with deep sorrow that the Islamic League has stopped the distribution of Asad's translation. We cannot make any comments about the objections raised by some people against the

translation, we are of opinion that it was the only work of value produced by the Islamic League, and it will be a tragedy if its distribution is stopped permanently.

In these days when the air is full of cheap political and religious propaganda, it is the sincere desire of Muslims to see Mecca and Madina as centres for Islamic studies. However, if the Islamic League finds itself unable to carry on its task of printing and publishing, it would be a great honour for any Muslim government or research institute to publish Asad's work.

It may be noted that on February 19, 1969, expressing his satisfaction with this review, Asad wrote the following letter to this writer.

“Dear Dr. Rashid Ahmad

The management of the Islamic Cultural Centre have sent me your review of the first volume of my Qur'an translation (*The Message of the Qur'an*). I find this review very penetrating. It is precisely the echo I wanted to produce, and I am very grateful to you.

I have also to thank you for drawing my attention to the *Tafsir Qashani* which I had not read so far. I will try to obtain a copy here, if possible.

It was also most appropriate on your part to draw the attention of your readers to the stoppage of the distribution of my work by the Islamic League. If you knew on what minor, almost insignificant ground, various of their 'experts' objected to some of my interpretations, you would be astounded to know to what depths intellectual activities have fallen among some of our so-called scholars, who are afraid of every breath of fresh air. Apparently they regard Islam as extremely brittle to use his own mind! On the other hand, I hardly need to point out to you how many seriously erroneous and damaging interpretations are to be found in other translations of the Holy Qur'an but these go unchallenged by our "scholars".

Anyhow, I am continuing my work with absolute dedication and a sense of responsibility before God, and I do hope that in the not too distant future the entire work will be published this time with the Arabic text independently of any arbitrary 'censorship'.

With my sincere regards and best wishes on the occasion of the coming *Id*.

Yours,
M. Asad”

Later in 1980, the students of the Qur'anic studies were happy to see that Asad's complete work on the Qur'an had been published. Again some objections were raised against the translation. In answer, Asad wrote a letter to the Editor, *Arabia, the Islamic World Review*, London, October, 1981. no. 2. The letter is as follows:

"To my great surprise and regret, several—although by no means all of the then members of the *Rābita's Council* took exception to certain of my interpretations of some Qur'anic verses and condemned the whole work out of hand. I have always been convinced that this "condemnation" was largely due to an insufficient command of the English language by each and every one of these critics and was obviously based on second-hand information. For instance, one of them even alleged that "Muhammad Asad denies the existence of angels." This allegation is, of course, totally false and absolute nonsense. On almost every page of my translation and commentary there is a mention of angels, and no Muslim in his right mind can or will deny that the Qur'an is full of references to angels and angelic forces. Of course, we do not know or pretend to know what the angels really are and how they manifest themselves: they belong to the realm of *al-ghayb*—that which is beyond the reach of human perception of which God alone has full knowledge.

However, I suppose that the particular statement that I have denied "angels" has arisen from a total misunderstanding of my note 93 on verses 124-125 of *Al-Imrān* which says, literally: "The Prophet's allusion to God's aiding the believers with thousands of angels signifies, metaphorically, a strengthening of the believers' hearts through spiritual forces coming from God" (*The Message of the Qur'an*, p. 86). This, by the way, was exactly the view of the greatest scholar of recent Muslim history, Muhammad 'Abduh, as quoted by me in the above mentioned note, citing *Al-Manār*.

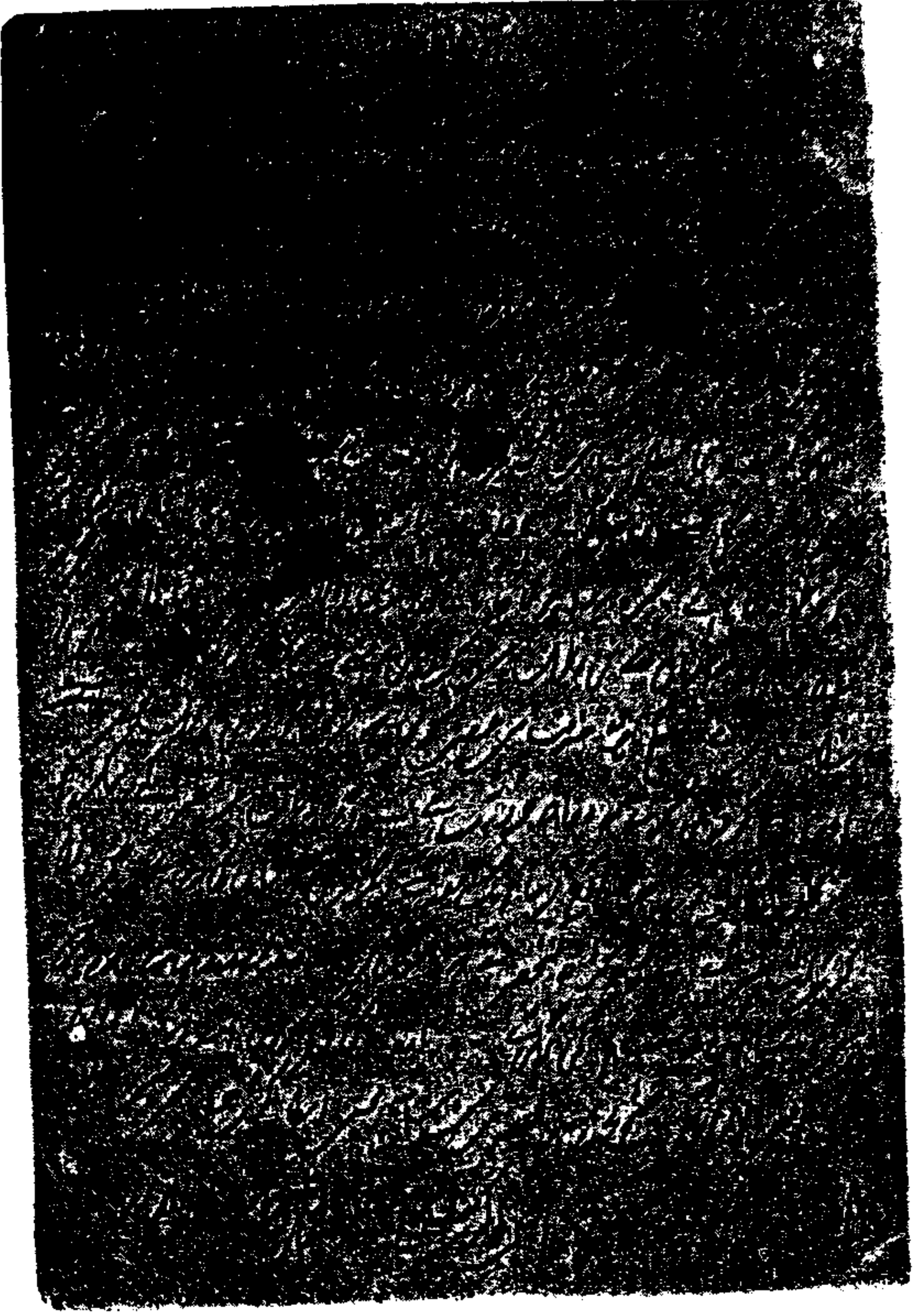
Still another member of the *Rābita* objected to my statement that Islam does not permit concubinage. I have explained verse 3 of *An-Nisā'* in my note 4 (on pp. 101-102 of *The Message of the Qur'an*), giving the considered view of Mufti Muhammad 'Abduh as well. Also, I would refer the reader of my work to note 26 on verse 24 of *An-Nisā'* and, in particular, to the views of *Ṭabari* (on the authority of *Ibn Abbās*, *Mujāhid* and others) and, still more prominently, of the illustrious Qur'an-commentator *Rāzi*, who points out that the reference to "all married

women," coming as it does immediately after the enumeration of prohibited degrees of relationship, is meant to stress the prohibition of sexual relations with any woman other than one's lawful wife.

Other persons, again, objected vehemently to my contention (expressed in my commentary) that nowhere in the Qur'an is to be found a statement to the effect that God raised Jesus *bodily* to heaven—a view which, by the way, was also held by no less a scholar than Muhammad 'Abduh). In my note 172 on verse 158 of *Al-Nisa* (pp. 134-135 of *The Message of the Qur'an*), I gave my reasons for the interpretation adopted by me. Whether this interpretation is accepted or not, however, the fact remains that it does not in any way offend against any fundamental Islamic belief. In this connection, I would refer the reader to verse 144 of *Al'Imran*, which speaks of all apostles before the last and greatest of them all, the Arabian Prophet Muhammad, as "having passed away, in other words, as having died physically, as is obvious from the context (see my corresponding note 104 on p. 89 of *The Message of the Qur'an*).

Whether one agrees or does not agree with my interpretations of this or that point, we should remember that even the great classical Qur'an commentators disagreed on many details, thus increasingly deepening and widening our understanding of the Holy Qur'an. So it will continue, *insha-Allah*, until the end of time. This has been and will always remain the spirit in which I approach the Message of the Holy Qur'an and the eternal heritage of the last Prophet. May God judge us all in His infinite wisdom and mercy".

(in: *Islam and Current Issues*. By Dr. Rashid Ahmad (Jullundhri), Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, n. d., pp. 135-152).



Iqbal's letter to Nazir Niazi (31st Oct. 1934). Iqbal did not receive Asad's letter.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

TWO APPROACHES TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE NOBLE QUR'AN

*A Comparative Study of the English Translations by
'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali and Muhammad Asad*

(Everyone who has attempted to translate the Noble Qur'an has arrived at the same conclusion: The text they try to translate is, in essence, untranslatable. But in spite of the enormity of the task, there exist a number of translations of the Glorious Qur'an in every living language. Each of these translations reflect the translator's understanding of the text, his or her particular intellectual and spiritual make-up as well as linguistic and ideological limitations. These translations are also heavily influenced by the social, economic and political milieu of the translator.

This paper attempts a comparative study of certain aspects of two twentieth century English translations of the Noble Qur'an: 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an¹ and Muhammad Asad's The Message of the Qur'an.²)

1. Introduction

No two men can be so different in their background, social and political milieu and life experiences as 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali (1872-1953) and Muhammad Asad (1900-1992).

Yusuf 'Ali was born and raised in British India. He had a brilliant academic career. He finished his high school at the age of fourteen, top of his year for Bombay, obtained first-class BA from

¹ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Misri, n.d.; henceforth=Y.

² Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; henceforth=A.

Bombay University in January 1891 and he was one of the nine students from India who were awarded a Bombay Government scholarship for further studies in Britain. The same year, his father died in July and with few ties remaining in India, Yusuf 'Ali arrived in England in September at the age of nineteen. He studied law at St. John's from the Michaelmas term of 1891 and was awarded a Tripos with a good Second in 1895.

Following the trend of his times, Yusuf 'Ali, like Muhammad 'Ali Jauhar and other talented young Indians, joined the coveted Indian Civil Service (ICS) in 1896. Appointed as Assistant Magistrate and Collector in Sahāranpur in the United Province, Yusuf 'Ali started his career in ICS at the bottom tier of the complex administrative structure which the British regime had invented to control India. He lived an uneven, turbulent and tragic life which had periods of calm certainty and economic prosperity.¹ He married a Britisher, lived and worked in India and Britain, went through personal tragedies and finally sought solace in the Qur'an by embarking upon its translation in 1929; he finished it eight years later. The political upheavals of Yusuf 'Ali's times, his peculiar understanding of the role of the British system in Indian politics, his affinity to the English Romantic poets and his relationship with the Raj had a significance impact on the choice of diction and vocabulary employed in his translation.

His commentary on the Qur'an includes six thousand, three hundred and eleven footnotes, three hundred pieces of running commentary in rhythmic prose, written in the style of blank verse, and fourteen appendices. It is a monumental work, sustained over a period of nine years (1928-37). During this period, Yusuf 'Ali went on a long journey in 1929. He was sponsored for a tour through America, Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China, Philippines, Stratis Settlements, Ceylon and India. In the preface to the first edition (of 1934), there is a comment about the manuscript being "carried about, thousands of miles, to all sorts of countries and among all sorts of people."²

A monumental work, Yusuf 'Ali's translation is a work of an intelligent and contemplative mind's encounter with the majesty of the Qur'an as the product of a response to a personal travail which "nearly

¹ For biographical details, see the excellent work by M. A. Sherif, *Searching for Solace: A Biography of 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, Interpreter of the Qur'an*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1994. A short biographical note is included at the end of the paper (appendix I).

² Y. p. iv.

unseated" his reason and made life seem meaningless.¹

Around the time of Muhammad Asad's first arrival in Lahore (1934), Yusuf 'Ali was ready to bring out parts of his commentary and translation of the Qur'an. The Preface to the first edition was dated April 4, 1934, his sixty-second birthday. This is also the year in which Asad published his *Islam at the Crossroads* (Arafat Publications, 1934, Delhi-Lahore). By March 1935, four installments of Yusuf 'Ali's translation had appeared, he had performed *Hajj* and was back in Lahore. His commentary in installments of about forty pages each became an instant success. In April, Yusuf 'Ali was re-appointed as the Principal of Islamia College on the suggestion of Allama Muhammad Iqbal but his second sojourn at the College was not entirely peaceful as he stood at the opposite side of the political divide—with the Unionists. By the end of 1937, having finished his commentary and translation, Yusuf 'Ali prepared to leave Lahore. He made his final round of calls, left the index for the complete translation of the Qur'an with Muhammad Ashraf, his publisher, met Iqbal for the last time and left Lahore in February 1938 for UP. He visited Aligarh, met Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru and in April went to London.

In 1955, eighteen years after the publication of Yusuf 'Ali's translation of the Qur'an, Muhammad Asad embarked upon his translation work. He seems to have been providentially placed in singular circumstances which led to a six year sojourn in the heart of Arabia, among people who still lived a life based on the same centuries-old pattern which existed during the life of the Prophet of Islam. Asad is the only European translator of the Qur'an who learned his Arabic experientially—from the people who spoke the language of the Qur'an. His rich experiences during the 1927-32 stay in Hijaz, his study of early history of Islam, familiarity with biblical sources and his understanding of western civilization are some of the important factors which have contributed to the uniqueness of his translation.

Asad was born at the turn of the century, on 2 July, 1900 in Lwów (Lemberg), eastern Galicia, then part of the Austrian empire but now in Poland. At birth, he was called Leopold Weiss. He was second of the three children and descendant of a long line of rabbis. His father had broken away from this tradition and had become a barrister.

Leopold spent his early years (1900-1913) in Lwów. He learned to read and speak Hebrew fluently; acquired some knowledge of

¹ Y. p. iv.

Aramaic, studied the Old Testament in its original language; learned the *Mishna* and *Gemara* (the text and commentaries of the Talmud) and immersed himself in the intricacies of biblical exegesis (*Targum*).

In 1914, his family moved to Vienna; young Leopold escaped from school and tried to join the Austrian army under a false name only to be recovered by his father after a week and taken home. However, in 1918, he was drafted in the army; but a few weeks later, the Austrian Empire collapsed and Leopold returned to Vienna where he joined the University of Vienna to study history of art and philosophy. The Vienna years (1918-20) were full of new experiences. The city was then the intellectual and cultural centre of Europe where the views of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Ludwig Wittgenstein filled the air. But Leopold had a restless nature. In the summer of 1920, he travelled all over Central Europe, doing "all manner of short-lived jobs".¹ Between 1920 and 1926, he travelled all over Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia.

In September 1926, while travelling in the Berlin subway with his wife Elsa, twenty-six year old Leopold Weiss had a profound experience during which he became aware of the spiritual torments of his fellow travellers, he came home and found his copy of the Qur'an at his desk, still open where he had left it. His eyes fell on the open page where he read *Surah At-Takāthur*. The next day he sought out an Indian friend, the head of the small Muslim community in Berlin, and embraced Islam; Elsa followed a few weeks later.

Thus Leopold Weiss became Muhammad Asad. His father and sister strongly disapproved of the conversion and broke off the relationship. The same year, Asad, Elsa and her son Heinrich Ahmad Schiemann, went for *Hajj*. They travelled by ship. Shortly after reaching Makkah, Elsa died. Asad was devastated.

A few weeks later, he met Prince Faysal in the library who invited him to the Royal palace. This started his life-long relationship with Al-Sa'ūd family. Around 1928, he married Munira bint Hussein As-Shammari of the As-Shammari tribe from Haa'il. During these years in Saudi Arabia, he worked on early Islamic history, travelled extensively, lived among the Bedouins, went on a mission to Cyrenaica to assess the needs of the guerrillas fighting the Italians under the command of 'Umar al-Mukhtār and wrote for the European newspapers.

In 1932, a son, Talal Asad, was born. Two years later, Asad left

¹ For these details, see his *The Road to Mecca*.

Arabia for India with plans to move on to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia but Muhammad Iqbal persuaded him to stay in India and join the struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

After the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, Asad first worked for the Government of the Punjab (Department of Religious Reconstruction) and then in the Foreign Service. He resigned from his job in 1954, married Pola Hamida and started to write again. The same year, he published *The Road to Mecca*. In 1964, the first volume of the translation, from *Surah al-Fātiha* to *Al-Toubah* was published as *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muslim World League, Makkah. A committee of scholars appointed to review the translation found it too controversial to be distributed on behalf of the League. Disappointed but not giving up, Asad continued working on the translation.

Twenty-five years after the beginning of his translation, the complete work was published as *The Message of the Qur'an* by Asad's own publishing concern, Dar al-Andalus. The translation is accompanied by five thousand three hundred and seventy-one footnotes and four appendices. Asad's extensive notes heavily rely on classical sources. Among the frequently cited commentaries are those by al-Ṭabari, Zamakhshari, Rāzi and *Tafsir Manār*.

1980 also saw the publication of a revised edition of *Islam at the Crossroads* after forty-six years with a new 'Author's Note' and twelve new footnotes. The same year, he published *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* and the fourth revised edition of *The Road to Mecca*. The next year, *The Road to Mecca* and *Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam* were republished by Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, the latter with a new preface (one page).¹ In 1985, Asad left Tangier and moved to Lisbon. In 1987, he published *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Essays which first appeared in *Arafat*). From Tangier, Asad moved to Mijas (Malaga) in the Andalusian province of Spain where he died on February 20, 1992. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery in Granada, Andalusia.

In spite of the differences in the lives and times of the two men, there are similarities which go beyond the individual experiences and social and historic backgrounds. Both men lived "intensely" and in a state of deep spiritual yearning. Both were concerned with the political and social situation of Muslims, both lived in India at least for some years and both had a profound attachment to the Qur'an. Both worked

¹ *Sahih al-Bukhāri: The Early Years of Islam* was first published in 1938 by Arafat Publications, Lahore, Pakistan.

on their translations toward the ends of their creative lives and both were deeply conscious of the momentous nature of their task as the translator of the Qur'an.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with general characteristics of the two translations; the second with their understanding and rendering of certain key Qur'anic terms.

2. General Characteristics

2.1 Sources

'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali states the following as his working principles:

"In matters of philology and language I accept the best authority among those who were competent to deal with these questions; the older the better. In matters of narration, contemporary authorities are best, subject to such corrections as have to be applied for their points of view. As to the particular occasions on which particular verses were revealed, the information is interesting and valuable from a historical point of view, and our older writers have collected ample material for it. But to lay much stress on it today puts the picture out of all perspectives. The Qur'an was not revealed for a particular occasion only, but for all time."¹

Tafsirs consulted by him include the monumental work of Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari (d. 310/922), *Jami' al-Bayān 'an Tāwil al-Qur'an*; *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqa'iq at-Tanzil* of Abu'l Qasim Mahmud Zamakhshari (d. 538/1143); *Tafsir Kabir* of Fakhr ud din Razi (d. 606/1209), *Anwār ut-Tanzil* of Qazi Nasirud din Abu Sa'id Baizāwi (d. 685/1286); *Tafsir al-Qur'an* of Abu'l Fida Isma'il Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1372); *Itqān fi 'ulum al-Qur'an* of Jalal uddin Suyuti (d.911/1505); *Tafsir Jalalain* of the two Jalaluddins, one of whom was the author of *Itqān*, the other being Jalaluddin Mahilli (d.864/1459); a few Urdu and Persian *Tafsirs* and *Tafsir al-Manār*, the joint work of Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905) and Rashid Riḍā. In addition, Yusuf 'Ali mentions *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* of Abu'l Qasim Husayn ar-Rāghib (d.

¹ Y. p. xi-xii.

503/1109) as his source. In all cases, Yusuf 'Ali pre-empted his usage with the disclaimer: "They are not, however, in any sense my authorities. They belong to widely different schools of thought, and some of them express extreme views with which I do not agree. I only adopt the general sense of accepted commentaries."¹

As a final source, Yusuf 'Ali mentions the Qur'an itself. "It has been said that the Qur'an is its own best Commentary. As we proceed with the study of the Book, we find how true this is... [its] one passage throws light on another."²

Muhammad Asad's "Works of Reference" contain all the above works; so both translators have had recourse to the same source material.³ He also states the two rules he has consistently observed:

"...the Qur'an must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as *one integral whole*: that is, as an exposition of an ethical doctrine in which every verse and sentence has an intimate bearing on other verses and sentences, all of them clarifying and amplifying one another... whenever this rule is faithfully observed, we realize that the Qur'an is — in the words of Muhammad 'Abduh — its own best commentary."⁴

Compare this with Yusuf 'Ali's approach stated above and we find that both translators are stating the same working principle as their guide to the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The second rule observed by Asad is, once again, similar to the one used by Yusuf 'Ali:

"No part of the Qur'an should be viewed from a purely *historical* point of view: that is to say, all its references to historical circumstances and events — both at the time of the Prophet and in earlier times — must be regarded as illustrations of the *human condition* and not as ends in themselves. Hence, the consideration of the historical occasion on which a particular

¹ Y. p. xi-xii.

² Y. p. xi-xiii.

³ Asad also includes dictionaries, *Seerah works* and Hadith collections in his reference works. A. pp. ix-x.

⁴ A. p. vii.

verse was revealed — a pursuit so dear, and legitimately so, to the hearts of the classical commentators — must never be allowed to obscure the underlying *purport* of that verse and its inner relevance to the ethical teaching which the Qur'an, taken as a whole, propounds."¹

Hence, we have two translations, based, more or less, on the same primary sources and done on the same working principles. Yet, the two translations differ in many ways as we shall see shortly.

Let us also note in passing that Asad relies heavily on his sources in matters of interpretation; Yusuf 'Ali does not. Asad's work is "an attempt — perhaps the first attempt— at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Qur'anic message into a European language."² He further states:

"The position of the individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptively into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Qur'an, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable — a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by Arab scholars."³

Among the various sources, Asad's reliance is more on Zamakhshari, which in itself is indicative of a peculiar attitude.⁴

2.2 Diction

Major differences between the two translations become

¹ A. p. vii.

² A. p. v.

³ A. p. v.

⁴ Zamakhshari (463/1070-538/1143) belonged to the Mu'tazilite school. He considered Arabic to be the queen of languages, though his own mother tongue was Persian. His commentary on the Qur'an, *al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tāwil*, was completed in 1134 (published at Calcutta in 1856 in 2 vols.). His grammatical work, *al-Mufasssal* (written 1119-21, published 1859) is celebrated for its concise but exhaustive exposition. He was also the author of a collection of old proverbs, three collections of apothegms composed by himself, moral discourses, and poems.

apparent as soon as we compare their diction. As already mentioned, Yusuf 'Ali's translation is highly influenced by the English Romantics. His running commentary in blank verse is written in the framework of a peculiar worldview which sought in the Qur'an a philosophy of otherworldliness, a slightly mystical but highly significant spiritual inner path and the pursuit of moral excellence. Given this framework, the commentary, as well as the translation, often attempt to leap into a poetic imagination rooted deep in the diction of English Romantics:

“The majesty, beauty, order, and harmony
Blazoned in His Creation, and His goodness
To all His creatures, in the heavens
And on earth. With Him are the sources
Of all things, and He doth freely give
His gifts in due measure. He holds
The keys of Life and Death, and He will remain
When all else passes away.”¹

The same holds true for the translation. Yusuf 'Ali's preference for the blank verse, his affinity to the language of English Romantics and his mystical leanings play an important role in the choice of words, their order and their cumulative effect.

Asad's translation, on the other hand, attempts to reproduce the message of the Qur'an in an idiom closer to modern English. While translating, he was conscious of two main factors: he was rendering into English a very difficult text and that he was translating for a specific readership: the modern western reader. Asad is the only European translator of the Qur'an who had learned his Arabic directly from the people who spoke Arabic as their native tongue. He makes a point to this effect in his introduction:

“When we look at the long list of translations — beginning with the Latin works of the high Middle Ages and continuing up to the present in almost every European tongue — we find one common denominator between their authors, whether Muslims or non-Muslims: all of them were — or are — people who acquired their knowledge of Arabic through academic study alone: that is, from books. None of them, however great his

¹ Y. C. 119, p. 636.

scholarship, has ever been familiar with the Arabic language as a person is familiar with his own, having absorbed the nuances of its idiom and its phraseology with an active associative response within himself, and hearing it with an ear spontaneously attuned to the *intent* underlying the acoustic symbolism of its words and sentences.”¹

This is an important distinction of Asad’s translation. He not only learned his Arabic directly from the people who spoke it, he was also fortunate enough to learn it before the age-old pattern of life in Hijaz came to an end because of modernization. During his stay in the Hijaz (1926-30), Asad often lived in the desert, among the Bedouins, and experienced life as it would have been fourteen hundred years ago. His life experiences, dramatically captured in his autobiography, *The Road to Mecca*,² placed him in singular circumstances to learn the symbolic value of Arabic roots and words. He heard the language as if it were “sung” to him in all its naturalness and immediacy.

Asad’s translation is replete with a careful understanding of nuances of the language. For example, explaining his translation verse 17 of *Surah al-Ghāshiyah* as “Do, then, they [who deny resurrection] never gaze at the clouds pregnant with water, [and observe] how they are created?”, he writes:

“... as regards the noun *ibil*, it denotes, as a rule, “camels”: a generic plural which has no singular form. But one must remember that it also signifies “clouds bearing rainwater” (*Lisān al-Arab, Qāmūs, Tāj al-‘Arūs*)—a meaning which is preferable in the present context. If the term were used in the sense of “camels”, the reference to it in the above verse would have been primarily—if not exclusively—addressed to the Arabian contemporaries of the Prophet, to whom the camel was always an object of admiration on account of its outstanding endurance, the many uses to which it could be put (riding, load-bearing, and as a source of milk, flesh and fine wool) and its indispensability to people living amid deserts. But precisely because a reference to the “camel” would restrict its significance to people of a particular environment and a particular time (without even the benefit of a historical allusion to past events),

¹ A. p. iii, emphasis is author’s.

² *The Road to Mecca*, New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1954.

it must be ruled out here, for the Qur'anic appeals to observe the wonders of the God-created universe are invariably directed at people of all times and all environments. Hence, there is every reason to assume that an allusion to the miraculous, cyclic process of the evaporation of water, the skyward ascension of vapour, its condensation and, finally, its precipitation over the earth is definitely more in tune with the subsequent mention (in verse 18-20) of sky, mountains and earth, than would be a reference to "camels", however admirable and noteworthy these animals may be."¹

Yusuf 'Ali and a host of other translators, including Pickthall, translate the word as "Camels": "*Do they not look at the Camels, how they are made?*"²

For a comparison of diction, let us see the translation of *Surah At-Takāthur*³ in Yusuf 'Ali and Asad's translations.

Yusuf 'Ali translates the title as "Piling Up":

1. *The mutual rivalry
For piling up (the good things
Of this world) diverts you
(From the more serious things).*
2. *Until ye visit the graves,*
3. *But nay, ye soon shall
Know (the reality).*
4. *Again, ye soon shall know!*
5. *Nay, were ye to know
With certainty of mind
(Ye would beware!)*
6. *Ye shall certainly see
Hell-fire!*

¹ A. p. 949.

² Y. p. 1728.

³ This *Surah* has played an important role in Asad's life. In September 1926, while travelling with his wife Elsa in a Berlin subway, Asad became aware of the spiritual torments of his fellow travellers. He returned home and found his copy of the Qur'an at his desk, still open where he had left it. His eyes fell on the page where he read *Surah At-Takāthur*. Then he sought out an Indian friend, the head of the small Muslim community in Berlin, and embraced Islam; Elsa followed a few weeks later. Thus Leopold Weiss became Muhammad Asad.

7. *Again, ye shall see it
With certainty of sight!*
8. *Then, shall ye be
Questioned that Day
About the joy
(Ye indulged in!)*¹

Asad translates the title as "Greed for more and more" and the *Surah* as:

- (1) *You are obsessed by greed for more and more (2) until you go down to your graves. (3) Nay, in time you will come to understand! (4) And once again: Nay, in time you will come to understand!*
- (5) *Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty,*
- (6) *you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]!*
- (7) *In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty:*
- (8) *and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life!*²

2.3 Vocabulary

Yusuf 'Ali chose a vocabulary which was close to his poetic ideals. His choice of words goes hand in hand with the overall style of his work as well as his own temperament. Thus we have abundant use of "Ye's" and "Thou's" which elevate the language and add solemnity to the translation.

Asad, on the other hand, "consciously avoided using unnecessary archaisms, which would only tend to obscure the meaning of the Qur'an to the contemporary reader."³ He was also conscious of rendering the translation without doing violence to the solemnity inherent in the Divine revelation.

Yusuf Ali translates 36:83 as: "*So glory to Him in Whose hands is the dominion of all things: And to Him will ye be brought back.*" Asad's translation of the same verse reads: "*Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hands rests the mighty dominion over all things; and unto Him you all will be brought*

¹ Y. p. 1780-81.

² A. p. 973.

³ A. viii.

back!"

Another significant aspect of the vocabulary in the two works is the way both translators have made use of the superlatives. Yusuf 'Ali translates 64:17 as: "If ye loan to God a beautiful loan, He will double it to your credit, and He will grant you Forgiveness: For God is most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing,"—

Asad's translation: "If you offer up to God a goodly loan, He will amply repay you for it, and will forgive you your sins: for God is ever responsive to gratitude, forbearing."

In general, Asad has a tendency of finding appropriate words (*ever responsive to gratitude, forbearing*) rather than using superlatives (*For God is most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing*,—)

This characteristic imparts a significant flavour to each translation, making the two works different in many respects. The abundant use of superlatives and capital letters by Yusuf 'Ali, in combination with his preference for archaic words, produces a text which is removed from common usage, elevated, poetic, distinct for its rhythmic qualities and it constantly reminds the reader that the text being read belongs to another category. "(He is) Lord of the East and the West: there is no god but He: Take Him therefore for (thy) Disposer of Affairs. (73:9)

Asad's translation, on the other hand, is "less poetic" but more direct. It has a quality of immediacy. He does not use too many capital letters (of course capital letters are used for God's names) yet manages to convey the uniqueness of the word through manipulation of word order: "The Sustainer of the east and the west is He; there is no deity save Him; hence, ascribe to Him alone the power to determine thy fate." (73:9)

One important aspect of the use of vocabulary is the way the two translators handle the *ijāz* of the Qur'an—that "inimitable ellipticism which often deliberately omits intermediate thought-clauses in order to express the final stage of an idea as pithily and concisely as is possible within the limitations of a human language".¹ Asad frequently uses interpolations between brackets to supply the thought links which cannot be established because the English language does not function in the same elliptical manner. This is also where the translator's understanding of the verse in question plays an important role. Consider, for instance, 13:7; Asad translates it as: "However, they who are bent on denying the truth [refuse to believe and] say: Why has no miraculous sign

¹ A. p. v.

ever been bestowed on him from on high by his Sustainer? [But] thou art only a warner; and [in God] all people have a guide."

Yusuf 'Ali's translation reads: "*And the Unbelievers say: Why is not a Sign sent down to him from his Lord? But thou art truly a warner, and to every people a guide.*"

Both translators have deemed it necessary to add footnotes to their translation of this verse. Asad points out that "according to the classical commentators, this sentence lends itself to several interpretations..." He then bases his interpretation on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās, Said ibn Jubayr, Mujāhid and Abu-Ishāk.

Yusuf 'Ali, as a rule, does not quote authorities; he "only adopts the general sense of accepted Commentators,"¹ as he mentioned in his note on the "Commentaries of the Qur'an".

The differences in diction and vocabulary are, however, not the most fundamental dissimilarities between the two translations, though these contribute to the overall effect of the work. Major differences lie in the two translators' understanding of the key Qur'anic terms. These are rooted deep in the two men's educational background, life experiences and the times in which they lived.

Yusuf 'Ali had started his translation in 1928. By then, the forty-four year old Yusuf 'Ali had already gone through such tragedies² that "the bitter anguish of a personal sorrow" nearly unseated his reason and "made life seem meaningless"; sought refuge in the Qur'an and his long cherished project provided him a new hope.³ This personal situation, the deep scars which afflicted his life and the anguish of an emotionally distraught man seeking solace are apparent in his approach to the Qur'an. But there are other indirect effects of the social and political climate of the times.

Yusuf 'Ali worked on his commentary at the zenith of the colonial era. From Indonesia to the Indian subcontinent and from the coasts of Mediterranean to the African deserts, most of the traditional Muslim lands were then under foreign subjugation. This political control was accompanied by an ethos in which Islamic civilization was considered to have almost perished. The West, and many educated Muslims, considered religion to be a thing of the past. Scientific rationalism was the main driving force behind contemporary world order and new technological inventions had reinforced the belief that

¹ Y. p. xii.

² Please see appendix I for details.

³ Y. p. iv.

science had replaced traditional religions.

In addition, Yusuf 'Ali was writing in British India when the Raj was at its zenith. He was also part of the Indian Civil Service. As such, he was more than inclined to stress the peaceful aspect of Islam. "War is only permissible in self-defence, and under well-defined limits," he wrote, explaining 2:190: *Fight in the cause of God those who but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors.*¹ "Islam is the religion of peace, goodwill, mutual understanding and good faith," he wrote elsewhere.²

In contrast, Muhammad Asad's translation was completed in 1980. The interval of forty-three years between the completion of two translations had brought major changes in the social and political realms. By the time Asad completed his work, almost all the Muslim countries had come out of the colonial yoke; the "oil boom" had produced a new sense of power and economic well-being in the oil-rich countries and major Islamic revivalist movements were drawing millions of young men and women to their fold. Along with this political revival, there was a renewed interest in Islam and its historic past. Islamic civilization, which was once considered to have almost perished, was in the midst of a major resurgence.

The scientific enterprise had also run its course and had landed in a relativistic uncertainty. There was no dearth of new discoveries and inventions (microprocessors, biological sciences, etc.) but most of the basic philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of scientific revolution had been seriously challenged. The notion that science is going to provide answers to all our questions was no more valid. Theories like the Big Bang and Hubble's calculations of the age of the universe, which once seemed to be unrefutable laws, had been found to have serious flaws.³

These and other similar factors make up the background of the understanding of the key Qur'anic terms by two men. Although both

¹ Y. n. 204, p. 75.

² Y. n. 205, p. 76.

³ Hubble's Law, named after the U.S. astronomer Edwin T. Hubble states that all the galaxies are receding and that the speed of recession increases with distance. Hubble's first estimate of the age of the universe was something less than 500 million years. Since the 1960s, the preferred age is between 10 to 20 billion years. But the origin of uncertainty and serious dents in the belief that science can provide all answers go further back to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle of 1926 which states that it is not possible simultaneously to measure the position and the speed of a particle such as electron.

seem to have a rationalistic attitude and both go back to the same sources, their rendering of certain key Qur'anic concepts is not always similar; the degree of difference varies from term to term. In some cases, their interpretation is relatively close, in others, they differ considerably.

3. Interpretation of certain Qur'anic Terms

3.1 *Al-Muqatta'āt*

Both translators have appended their works with notes on *al-Muqatta'āt*.¹ Yusuf 'Ali's appendix is pre-empted by an apologetic note which tries to smooth some of the opinions about the abbreviated letters. "Opinions are divided," he writes, "as to the exact meaning of each particular letter or combination of letters, but it is agreed that they have a mystic meaning... if we are asked to believe that certain initials have a meaning which will be understood in the fullness of time or spiritual development, we are asked to draw upon Faith, but we are not asked to do any violence to our reason."²

Yusuf 'Ali then dwells on various harmonic relationships which exist in the numbers of these letters and their appearance. He draws the conclusion that all the *Surahs* which start with *al-Muqatta'āt* refer to the Qur'an or the Book. He then explains that the exceptions to this characteristic feature, mentioned in *Itqān*, are not really exceptions because the three *Surahs* (*Ankabūt*, *Rum* and *Nur*; nos. 29, 30, 68 respectively) taken as exception *do* refer to the Book.³

Asad also refers to the same characteristic feature, though in a slightly modified form⁴ and explains the three exceptions, though somewhat differently for the *Surahs* 29 and 30. However, he does point

¹ Y: Appendix I, p. 118-120; A: Appendix II, p. 992-3.

² Y. p. 118.

³ In *Surah* 29, verses 27 and 45-51; in *Surah* 30, verse 58 and the relationship between God's signs in nature (30: 20-27) and His revelation in the Qur'an; in *Surah* 68, the opening verse which starts with the mention of "Pen" as the instrument of writing and ends with the declaration that it is a Message for all the worlds. Y. p. 120.

⁴ He states that "all *surahs* prefixed by these letter-symbols *open*, directly or obliquely, with a reference to revelation, either in its generic sense or its specific manifestation", the Qur'an. (A. p. 992. Emphasis added.) Yusuf 'Ali does not refer to the opening, just the mention of the Qur'an somewhere in the *surah*.

out that this "very attractive interpretation is not entirely satisfactory inasmuch as there are many *Surahs* which open with an explicit reference to divine revelation and are nevertheless not preceded by any letter-symbol."

Yusuf 'Ali's mystic approach is more pronounced in his explanation of *al-Muqatta'at* and his appendix is strongly tilted toward a mystical understanding of the letter-symbolism while Asad is non-committal. Yusuf 'Ali explains every abbreviated letter at its first occurrence, Asad does not.

3.2 Symbolism and Allegory

Allegorical verses of the Qur'an have drawn the attention of countless commentators. Every translator confronts the problem of translation and explanation of these verses. Both Yusuf 'Ali and Asad describe in detail their understanding of such verses. Yusuf 'Ali has included an appendix on the "Allegorical Interpretation of the Story of Joseph"¹ and Asad also has an appendix on "Symbolism and Allegory in the Qur'an".²

Both translators emphasize the fact that things "beyond" the grasp of human intellect can only be understood by way of allegory and symbolism and both mention the fact that interpretation of the allegorical verses (*āyāt Mutashābihāt*) is susceptible to more than one interpretation. Yusuf 'Ali's commentary on *Surah Yusuf* is of particular interest. He points out symbolism, clash of good and evil and the progression from lower to higher states in the narrative.

For Asad, symbolism and allegory have two functions: a metaphysical and a psychological. The metaphysical aspect of the allegorical verses relate to the realm which is beyond the reach of human perception (*al-ghayb*). The psychological aspect of the allegory is based on the fact that the human mind can only operate on the basis of perceptions previously experienced by that very mind either in their entirety or in some of their constituent elements. Since the metaphysical ideas of religion relate, by virtue of their nature, to a realm beyond the reach of human perception and experience, they can only be grasped "through a parabolic illustration, by means of something which we know from our experience, of something that is beyond the reach of our

¹ Appendix VI, pp. 592-600.

² A. Appendix I, pp. 989-991.

perception” (*tamthilan li-ma ghaba ‘anna bi-ma nushahid*).¹

Of course, the allegorical interpretation of the Qur’an is nothing new. There are many *Tafāsir* which have used this method of interpretation.² Kāshāni’s allegorical interpretation of 20:12, (“A voice cried out: ‘Moses’) I am thy Lord! Take off thy sandals. Thou art in the holy valley, Muwa”) is one such example.³ In his *Kitab Jawāhir al-Qur’an* (*The Jewels of the Qur’an*),⁴ al-Ghazālī also explains many benefits of employing allegories in the Qur’an.

Asad explains the need for employing allegories on both the metaphysical as well as the psychological levels. In his appendix I, he states:⁵

“What is needed is a more direct appeal to the intellect, resulting in a kind of “visualization” of the consequences of one’s conscious acts and omissions: and such an appeal can be effectively produced by means of metaphors, allegories and parables, each of them stressing, on the one hand, the absolute *dissimilarity* of all that man will experience after resurrection from whatever he did or could experience in this world; and, on the other hand, establishing means of *comparison* between these two categories of experience”.

¹ A., quoting Zamakhshari, p. 990.

² For useful bibliography see, G.R. Hawting and Abdul Kader A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur’an*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 314-325; Helmut Gätje, *The Qur’an and its Exegesis*, Eng. Trans. by Alford T. Welch, Oxford: One World, 1996; Ahmad von Denfer, *Ulum al-Qur’an*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1983.

³ Where he writes: “Take off thy sandals: namely, your soul and your body, or your two (temporal) forms of existence, since when one is free from soul and body, one is free from both (temporal) forms of existence. That is: As soon as one is free, through the spirit (*rūb*) and the inner mystery (*sirr*), from the properties and characteristics of the soul and the body, so that one is united with the holy spirit, then one is free from the soul and the body (also) through the heart (*qalb*) and the breast (*sadr*), since the general connection (with them) is severed, their actions are released, and one has escaped their properties and activities...”, quoted from Helmut Gätje, *The Qur’an and its Exegesis*, Eng. trans. by Alford T. Welch, Oxford: One World, 1996, pp. 234-35.

⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Kitab Jawāhir al-Qur’an* (*The Jewels of the Qur’an*), Eng. tr. Muhammad Abdul Quasem, London: Kegan Paul International, 1983, pp. 62-63.

⁵ A. p. 990.

3.3 The Angels and the *Jinn*

Asad has found it necessary to add an appendix "On the term and concept of *Jinn*".¹ Yusuf 'Ali has merely explained the term in a footnote.² Both refer to the etymology of the word, both mention that the root verb is *janna*, "he [or "it"] concealed" or "covered with darkness". Asad further states:³

"since the verb is also used in the intransitive sense ("he [or "it"] was [or "became"] concealed", resp. "covered with darkness"), and, in a more general sense, "that which is concealed from "[man's] senses", i.e., things, beings or forces which cannot normally be perceived by man but have, nevertheless, an objective reality, whether concrete or abstract, of their own."

Yusuf 'Ali also clarifies his concept in these words: "Some people say that *jinn* therefore means the hidden qualities or capacities in man; others that it means wild or jungle folk hidden in the hills or forests. I do not wish to be dogmatic, but I think, from a collation and study of the Qur'anic passages, that the meaning is simply "a spirit," or an invisible or hidden force."⁴

Asad's concept of the term is more elaborate. He includes a wide range of phenomena in the term. "According to most of the classical commentators, [this] indicate certain *sentient organism* of so fine a nature and of a physiological composition so different from our own that they are not normally accessible to our sense-perception."⁵ He also states that the Qur'an uses the term to denote "those elemental forces of nature— including human nature — which are "concealed from our senses" inasmuch as they manifest themselves to us only in their effects but not in their intrinsic reality."⁶

Asad also refers to the specific occasions where the term *jinn* "may denote beings not invisible in and of themselves but, rather, 'hitherto unseen being'." He includes 72:1 in this category where he translates *jinn* as "unseen beings". In his note to 72: 1, he points out that

¹ A. Appendix III, p. 994.

² Y. n. 929, p. 319.

³ A. p. 994.

⁴ Y. n. 929, p. 319.

⁵ A. p. 994.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 994.

“... all this leads one to the assumption that they may have been Jews from distant parts of what is now the Arab world, perhaps from Syria or even Mesopotamia.¹

Asad’s concept of *jinn* include another category: “References to *jinn* are sometimes meant to recall certain legends deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people to whom the Qur’an was addressed in the first instances.”² And he includes 34: 12-14 in this category, which he, once again, translates as “invisible beings.”³

This understanding plays a pivotal role in his explanation and translation of 8:9-10: *Lo! You were praying unto your Sustainer for aid, whereupon He thus responded to you: “I shall, verily, aid you with a thousand angels following one upon another!” And God ordained this only as a glad tiding and that your hearts should thereby be set at rest—since no succour can come from any save God: verily, God is almighty, wise!”*

Asad emphasizes the *spiritual nature* of this angelic aid, just as he emphasizes it 3:125; both Asad and Yusuf ‘Ali take the numbers to be indicative of unlimited nature of God’s aid, rather than being literal.

This emphasis on *spiritual nature* of the aid is supported on the authority of *Tafsir al-Manār*. Yusuf ‘Ali does not allude to the spiritual nature of aid at all. This subtle difference in two men is also an indication of their rationalistic (Asad) and mystical (Yusuf ‘Ali) leanings respectively.

¹ A. p. 899.

² A. p. 995.

³ A. p. 656. The translation of the verses reads: *And unto Solomon [We made subservient] the wind: its morning course [covered the distance of] a month’s journey, and its evening course, a month’s journey. And we caused a fountain of molten copper to flow at his behest; and [even] among the invisible beings there were some that had [been constrained] to labour for him by the Sustainer’s leave — and whichever of them deviated from Our command, him would We let taste suffering through a blazing flame —; they made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, and statues, and basins as [large as] great watering-troughs, and cauldrons firmly anchored. [And We said:] “Labour, O David’s people, in gratitude [toward Me]—and [remember that] few are the truly grateful [even] among My servants!” Yet [even Solomon had to die; but] when We decreed that he should die, nothing showed them that he was dead except an earthworm that gnawed away his staff. And when he fell to the ground, those invisible beings [subservient to him] saw clearly that, had they but understood the reality which was beyond the reach of their perception, they would not have continued [to toil] in the shameful suffering [of servitude].*

3.4 The Night Journey (Isrā') and the Ascension (Mi'rāj)

The Prophet's "Night Journey" (*Isrā'*) and the subsequent "Ascension" (*Mi'rāj*) to heaven almost exactly one year before the Hijra to Madinah have been the subject of various interpretations. Some commentators have believed both of these to be *physical occurrences*, that is to say that the Prophet was bodily borne to Jerusalem and then to heaven, while others held that the experience was purely spiritual. Ṭabari, Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathir mention the name of Ā'isha among the latter, who declared that the Prophet was transported only in his spirit (*bi-ruhīhi*, cf. their commentaries on 17:1). Asad mentions this fact and then goes on to explain the position of other theologians who rely on the verse, *asra bi-'bdīhi* ("He transported His servant") to assert that the Ascension involved both the body and the soul, since *'bd* denotes a living being in its entirety. However, he relies on the *Ahādith* on the subject to maintain that the Night Journey and the Ascension could not have been physical because of the symbolic nature of the description of events during the journey.

Yusuf 'Ali is non-committal, though he mentions both possibilities. He states that "majority of the Commentators take this Night Journey literally, but allow that there were other occasions on which a spiritual Journey or Vision occurred. Even on the supposition of a miraculous bodily Journey, it is conceded that the body was almost transformed into a spiritual fineness."¹

Conclusion

In the final analysis, we have two excellent translations, each with its peculiarities. Of the two works, Yusuf 'Ali's has proven to be more popular than Asad's, perhaps—at least in part—due to its easy availability. But Asad's translation is also gradually drawing a faithful readership. Both translations employ a number of techniques to make the translation accessible to a wide variety of readers. Asad uses extensive notes which refer back to classical commentaries and lexicons, Yusuf 'Ali uses running commentaries and notes, though without references to historical sources. Both know, that in the final analysis, their efforts are but a human endeavour which can never reach perfection.

¹ Y. 961.

Even their choices of title reflect their basic concerns. Asad chose the word "Message", for his main preoccupation was with the Message of the Qur'an which he saw as the main vehicle for an Islamic renaissance. All his works are reflective of this main concern. While in Pakistan, he devoted his time and energy to the religious reconstruction, later he wrote a book on the political aspects of Islam and his numerous speeches and articles in the monthly *'Arafat*—in fact all of his writings—are indicative of this main concern.

Yusuf 'Ali, on the other hand, was more interested in the inner meaning of the Divine Word. He saw the Qur'an more as an ethical and moral code. Therefore the key word in his title is "Meaning". This is also reflective of the dilemmas of his own life.

These general conclusions are not meant to be a reductive summary of the two works. They remain outstanding, both in scholarship as well as in spiritual insight, among all the English translations of the Qur'an. Indeed, both translators must have been helped by a force from beyond the human realm.

Appendix I

*Biographical Note on 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali (1872-1953)*¹

The 1870's was a decade of exceptional importance in the history of the Indian subcontinent. During this decade a brilliant generation of Muslims arose which was to leave its indelible mark on the world history. Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah, Muhammad 'Ali Jauhar, Muhammad Iqbal, Shaikh Abdul Qadir and Fazl-i Husain were all born during this decade. He was born in Surat, a textile town in Gujrat, Western India. His parents belonged to the Bohra community which traces its Muslim ancestry to the efforts of preachers sent by the Fatimid Caliphs in Cairo. Yusuf 'Ali Allahbukhsh, father of this newly born was an official in Surat's police force. The boy was named Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali. He was to be a remarkable man of "extraordinary industry and deep emotion", as his biographer, M. A. Sherif, writes in this most appropriately titled biography, *Searching for Solace*.

Yusuf 'Ali embarked upon a remarkable personal journey when

¹ Adopted from my review on M. A. Sherif's *Searching for Solace*, in: *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Winter 1998.

he was sent to Bombay to attend the new school established by the *Anjuman-e Islam* when he was hardly eight or nine. But Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's father did not leave his son at the *Anjuman's* school for long and in 1882, when he was barely ten, he was sent to the school of the Free Church of Scotland. This Scots-run institution had a very formal setting and bore the "stamp of its founder, the eponymous Rev. John Wilson, a noteworthy linguist, specialist in the antiquities of Western India and translator of the Bible into Marathi." Yusuf 'Ali matriculated from this school at the age of 15 and joined its senior section, Wilson College, which was affiliated with the University of Bombay.

Yusuf 'Ali had a brilliant academic career. He finished his high school at the age of fourteen, top of his year for Bombay, obtained first-class BA from Bombay University in January 1891 and he was one of the nine students from India who were awarded a Bombay Government scholarship for further studies in Britain—an allowance of 200 pounds per annum for a period of three years. The same year his father died in July and with few ties remaining in India, Yusuf 'Ali arrived in England in September at the age of nineteen. He studied law at St. John's from the Michaelmas term of 1891 and was awarded a Tripos with a good Second in 1895.

Following the trend of his times Yusuf 'Ali, like Muhammad 'Ali Jauhar and other talented young Indians, had decided to join the prized Indian Civil Service (ICS). While still at Cambridge, he had applied to be a candidate in the ICS open competition examination to be held in August 1894. Yusuf 'Ali obtained top marks in English composition and excelled in Roman and English Law. However, he still had to take a final examination in September of the following year. Yusuf 'Ali spent the probationary year preparing for the Part II law tripos at Cambridge and in pursuing studies at University College, London and working for his admission to the Bar.

In September 1895, Yusuf 'Ali sat for the Code of Civil Procedure and Indian Contract Act, Arabic and horsemanship and came top of the list, obtaining 385 marks in Urdu and 340 in Arabic out of a total of 400. Just before the end of the year, young Yusuf 'Ali left England, arrived at the Adriatic port of Brindisi in Italy overland and from there took an ocean liner to Bombay. Later, he was to remember his four year sojourn in England as the period which "was to make me a student in the real sense, awakening in me an insatiable urge to acquire knowledge and a love of study."

Appointed as Assistant Magistrate and Collector in Sahāranpur

in the United Province, Yusuf 'Ali started his career in ICS at the bottom tier of the complex administrative structure which the British regime had invented to control India. Two years later, he was transferred to Bareilly which was not far from Aligarh where Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO) was located. Yusuf 'Ali had the "honour of knowing Sir Sayyid in the latter years of his life." However, Sir Sayyid died in March 1898 and Yusuf 'Ali's association with him remained brief.

At the turn of the century, twenty-eight-year-old Yusuf 'Ali published his first literary work: *A Monograph on Silk Fabrics Produced in the North Western Provinces and Oudh*. In spite of its pedantic title, the work contained cultural, technical and industrial information, including a section on *Abādith* sub-divided into those derived from Sunni and Shi'ah sources.

An important turning point in Yusuf 'Ali's life came in 1900 when he went to England and married Teresa Mary Shalders on September 18 in Bournemouth, following Church of England rites; Teresa was twenty-seven. The marriage was solemnized by Canon Henry Slater in St. Peter's Church—a place which was considered famous because Shelley's heart was buried in its cemetery. Teresa came to UP where their first child, Edris, was born in November 1901. A second child, Asghar Bloy, was born in October of the following year.

Teresa and the boys soon left India and settled in a house on Lemsford Road, St. Albans where another son, Alban Hyder, was born in September 1904. Yusuf 'Ali joined his family in 1905, at the beginning of his first furlough; by then he was already a Deputy Commissioner, well placed in the élite circles of Indians reaching high office in the ICS. Soon after arriving in England, Yusuf 'Ali belatedly recorded his call to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn.

1905 was an important year for the small circle of Indian Muslims in England. It was the year in which Muhammad Iqbal first arrived in Britain on a Government scholarship and sought admission in Lincoln's Inn. Abdul Qadir was studying for the Bar, Justice Ameer Ali, who had recently retired with his English wife to a country house in Berkshire, regularly came to London and Badruddin Tayebji was also there for medical treatment. It was in this small circle of family friends that Iqbal met 'Atiya Fyzee of the Tayebji clan and where Yusuf 'Ali first experienced the exhilarating taste of literary companionship.

The dawn of a new century, companionship with a group of exceptionally gifted fellow Indians and the burning desire to do

something for the cause of Muslims of India all conspired to provide young and poetic Yusuf 'Ali that mental and intellectual freedom which makes one believe that everything is possible. He was brimming with ideas. His speeches and writings of this period are full of optimism. During his stay in England, he gave six lectures at the Passmore Edwards Institute, London. Later he published a book, *Life and Labour of the People of India* (John Murray, London, 1907) based on these lectures. He met Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, on several occasions to discuss issues of political reform. His ideas on India and the reforms needed were much appreciated and he was a sought after speaker. He was invited into a select circle of royalty and had connections in many high places. But his furlough was about to finish and he was to return to India where, once again, he would fit into the "administrator-cum-scholar" image of the ICS officers. Before he left England, a daughter, Leila Teresa, was born in December 1906.

Yusuf 'Ali arrived back in India, without his wife and children, and by March 1907, he had resumed his duties as Deputy Commissioner of Sultanpur. But the short-lived period of joyous family and social life was almost over. In February 1908, Yusuf 'Ali took nine months of medical leave and rushed to England after hearing news about his wife's infidelity. The hurt caused by Teresa's affair with an Englishman, Obed Thorne, was the first deep scar which was to haunt Yusuf 'Ali for the rest of his life. However, Yusuf 'Ali did not file for a divorce until 1910 when Teresa gave birth to the son of her lover in September. The divorce petition was heard at the High Court's Family Division in June and made a decree absolute in January 1912. Yusuf 'Ali gained custody of all his children whose ages ranged from five to ten years. He, however, left them in the care of an English governess and departed for India. (Later, he was to disclaim all of them in the will he drew up in 1940.) Teresa married again, but not to Mr. Obed Thorne but to a Mr. Astell.

In 1912, Yusuf 'Ali was Magistrate and Collector for UP district of Fatehpur and James Meston had become Lieutenant-Governor of the Province. UP was then in the grip of political turmoil and in 1913, the situation came to a head in Kanpur, a small town fifty miles from Fatehpur. The Kanpur Mosque incident aroused strong feelings against the British all over India and Yusuf 'Ali found himself torn between his religious and official affiliations. In February 1914, Yusuf 'Ali decided to leave ICS. But according to the rules, he required twenty years' of service before a proportionate pension could be permitted. He sought

Meston's help who wrote a very supportive letter. But Yusuf 'Ali did not wait for the official word on his application and left India for Britain to look after his children. On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Yusuf 'Ali was then in Seenoaks, Kent. Four days later, he wrote to the India Office: "I am prepared and shall be pleased to volunteer for temporary service, in any capacity in which I can be useful on account of the War."

Between 1914 and 1920, in the backdrop of momentous events which resulted in a humiliating defeat for Turkey and an equally embarrassing end of the Khilāfat Movement in India, Yusuf 'Ali appears as an Indian who, in spite of his Muslim background, is extremely loyal to the British Empire. His "unabashed declaration of loyalty" in a speech at Caxton Hall, on 23 November, 1914 provides an insight into his sense of pride and loyalty to the British Raj:

"... we are indeed Indians, but also Britishers. But most heart-stirring of all is the appeal of one who knows intimately every part of his Empire as no Sovereign before him knew it—one whose *chibra-e mubarak* [auspicious face] was seen with pride and glory by millions of men in Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta less than three years ago... the King-Emperor calls. India salutes and falls in, ready to die for country, Padisha, flag and Empire."

This passionate speech, reported in *Asiatic Review*, (Vol. 6, 1915; pp. 26-33) and the episode following this speech in which Yusuf 'Ali actually undertook a journey to Scandinavia on behalf of the British Foreign Office to counter anti-British propaganda by an assortment of Irish, Egyptian and Indian groups pitched Yusuf 'Ali against a strong group of anti-British Indian nationalists. By the time War ended, Yusuf 'Ali was patently a Britisher who was used by the Raj to pacify anti-Raj sentiments. The so-called Peace Conferences at which the fate of the now vanquished Central Powers was determined also redraw the map of the Muslim world. The Secretary of State for India and official leader of the Indian delegation at the Conference, Edwin Montagu, made use of the services of "three prominent Indian Muslims: His Highness the Aga Khan, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan and Mr. Yusuf 'Ali" to pacify the outrage felt over the agreement.

After marrying another English lady, Gertrude Anne Mawbey, the daughter of Thomas Mawbey, a Derby magistrate and printer, Yusuf 'Ali returned to India. His children from Teresa, especially Bloy, who

was now almost twenty, had started to criticize him openly and Yusuf 'Ali might have wanted to save his second marriage from the shadows of the first. In any case, Yusuf 'Ali arrived in India with his young wife, to whom he gave the Muslim name of Ma'suma, the innocent—perhaps in an unconscious effort to prevent the repeat of the first marriage experience—to a life of much greater personal contentment and over two decades of creative literary activity.

At the time of Yusuf 'Ali's arrival in India, Kingdom of Deccan, being ruled by the young prince Mir Osman Khan, had become the focus of Muslim intelligentsia loyal to the Raj. He served briefly as a counsel in the Nizam's *Sarfi khas*, a body which administered the 'crown' lands, and later in 1921, became Revenue Member of the Executive Council of the State. But in 1922, he resigned abruptly from his post perhaps due to court intrigues. During his stay in Hyderabad, a son, Rashid, was born in August 1922.

From Hyderabad, Yusuf 'Ali went to United Province's Lucknow Bar to practice and to write. This independence and a growing sense of responsibility led Yusuf 'Ali to a re-evaluation of his preferences. In March 1923, he presented a paper on Babur based on the King's diary at a meeting of the United Provinces Historical Society which shows his changing attitude toward the Muslim past. Ten years previously, he had praised George V and his *chibra-e-mubarak*, now it was Babur who had cropped up in his imagination as a hero whose many qualities he was to sum up in a poignant paragraph: "Thus lived and died a brave and generous man. His hardy life tilled in with his love of nature. His adventures, failures and successes never dried up the milk of human kindness in him. The sincerity of his soul, in strength and weariness, shines from every page of his self-revealing record."

Yusuf 'Ali now devoted time to his two books on India, *The Making of India* and *India and Europe*. He briefly went to England in 1923 and then returned to Lahore in 1924, in time for the fortieth anniversary of *Anjuman-e Himayat-ul-Islam*. He was offered the principalship of Anjuman's Islamic College at the beginning of the next academic session which he accepted. Yusuf 'Ali returned to England and spent a joyful summer with Ma'suma and Rashid. He moved to a new house in Chiswick and organized a publication programme with Luzac in London for a series entitled "Progressive Islam Pamphlets". The first of these, "Greatest Need of the Age", was published in August 1925 and the second, based on his lecture, "Islam as a World Force", presented on the occasion of the Anjuman's anniversary in Lahore. He also

contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* on the term *Khodja* and the nineteenth-century Shaikh Karamat 'Ali Jawnpuri. These writings marked his debut as an Islamic scholar.

Yusuf 'Ali's life between his arrival in Lahore to take up the principalship of Islamia College and 1928 was filled with many personal, ideological and political battles. In Lahore, he was a well-known personality with rather strong views and characteristic pro-Raj stance. He left Islamia College in 1928 and in the spring of that year, he left India for Baghdad and visited Karbala, using the old boat bridge at al-Musib to cross the Euphrates. By now, fifty-seven-year-old Yusuf 'Ali had half a dozen books to his name, over a dozen learned articles, six pamphlets and two entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. In Lahore, his life had been rich and busy with presidency of numerous Indian cultural and educational conferences and membership in several learned bodies. His vision of a progressive Islam was an integral part of his loyalty to the Empire but the political and social scene was rapidly changing around him.

Yusuf 'Ali was selected as a representative of India to the forthcoming assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva the following month, along with Earl of Lytton, a former Governor of Bengal, the Nawwab of Palanpur and Sir Kurma Reddi, a former minister of the Madras government. Apart from this assignment, Yusuf 'Ali was widely recognized by the British as well as Indian circles as the foremost representative of Islam, especially after the death of Syed Ameer 'Ali in August 1928. Time had come for him to embark on his most ambitious project: translation of the Qur'an.

In 1929, Yusuf 'Ali was sponsored on a tour through America, Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China, Philippines, Straits Settlements, Ceylon and India. During these travels, he worked by day extolling the British Empire and pored over his labour of love at night. In the preface to his translation of the Noble Qur'an, he mentions that the manuscript was "carried about, thousands of miles, to all sorts of countries and among all sorts of people".

Yusuf 'Ali was not a major player during the Round Table Conferences in London. In fact, he was touring Canada when the concluding conference was held. He returned to Lahore in September 1932 in connection with various public duties. It was also in Lahore, in early 1934, that he was ready to bring out parts of his commentary and translation of the Qur'an. The Preface to the first edition was dated April 4, 1934, his sixty-second birthday. By March 1935, four

installments had appeared, Yusuf 'Ali had performed *Hajj* and was back in Lahore. The installments of about forty pages each became an instant success. In April, Yusuf 'Ali was re-appointed as the Principal of Islamia College on the suggestion of Muhammad Iqbal but his second sojourn at the College was not entirely peaceful as he stood at the opposite side of the political divide—with the Unionists. By the end of 1937, having finished his commentary and translation, Yusuf 'Ali prepared to leave Lahore. He made his final round of calls, left the index for the complete translation of the Qur'an with Muhammad Ashraf, his publisher, met Iqbal for the last time and left Lahore in February 1938 for UP. He visited 'Aligarh, met Congress President Jawaharlal Nehru and in April returned to London by air for the first time.

Details about the final years of Yusuf 'Ali's life are rather sketchy. These years are marked by his estrangement from Ma'suma, increasing isolation and declining physical, emotional and spiritual resources. *Times* was to report the end of this rich and intense life in the following words:

“In advancing age he seemed to have a sense of frustration to find that so much of what he had done was vanity and vexation of spirit... Unhappily Yusuf 'Ali's last years were clouded by mental aberration. He entirely neglected his family duties and avoided financial responsibilities for his nominal home. In addition to his proportionate ICS pension he had private means; but he sank to a level of apparent poverty and lack of cleanliness which brought concern to old friends. He wandered about at the end, an unquiet spirit with no fixed abode.”

On December 9, 1953, police found him sitting on the steps of a house in Westminster. He was taken to Westminster Hospital where he spent the night. The next day the casualty officer discharged him and a police constable left Yusuf 'Ali in a nearby London County Council institution for the elderly in Dovehouse Street, Chelsea. The next day he suffered a heart attack and was rushed to St. Stephen's Hospital in Fulham where he died three hours later.

An inquest was conducted by the Coroner of the County of London on 14 and 16 December 'in fairness to the widow and the hospitals'. The Coroner concluded that he was perfectly satisfied that everything that could be done for Yusuf 'Ali had been done. A death certificate was issued noting 'senile myocardial degeneration' as cause of

death. Staff at the Pakistan High Commission arranged the funeral and he lies buried in Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey, not far from the Woking Mosque. The grave is near that of Marmaduke Pickthall, another distinguished scholar of the Qur'an.

Yusuf 'Ali had appointed as the trustees and executors of his will, prepared in 1940, Lloyds Bank, his son Rashid and his solicitor, Harold Syms. Acting on its terms, Lloyds Bank duly notified London University of the bequest that had been left to them for a fund for the benefit of Indian students. Yusuf 'Ali had specifically asked that it should be 'called after my name'. However a meeting of the Court in 1954 deemed it part of the Vice-Chancellor's Discretionary Fund for Indian Students. Yusuf 'Ali also left instructions for his diaries: 'I bequeath to the Muslim University of ' Aligarh [*sic*] (United Provinces, India) free of duty all my diaries (now kept in a black steel box locked), and I direct that such diaries shall be deposited by the University in its Library and shall not be opened until the expiration of 30 years from my death.' These were never sent to Aligarh and their fate is perhaps one of the secrets which Masuma carried to her grave in 1962.

Yusuf Ali's worldview was totally out of place with the current of history. He lived with his ideals of an apolitical Islam and imagined a world in which a grand reconciliation could be achieved between people of different faiths. His involvement with the World Congress of Faiths and his emphasis on spiritual fellowship with others in a non-political manner gradually isolated him from the main historical events of his times and the demise of the Empire further enhanced this isolation.

Appendix II

Biographical Note on Muhammad Asad

Asad was born at the turn of the century, on 2 July, 1900 in Lwów (Lemberg), eastern Galicia, then part of the Austrian empire but now in Poland. At birth, he was called Leopold Weiss. He was second of the three children and descendant of a long line of rabbis. His father had broken away from this tradition and had become a barrister.

Leopold spent his early years (1900-1913) in Lwów. He learned to read and speak Hebrew fluently; acquired some knowledge of Aramaic, studied the Old Testament in original; learned the *Mishna* and *Gemara* (the text and commentaries of the Talmud) and immersed himself in the intricacies of Biblical exegesis (*Targum*).

In 1914, his family moved to Vienna; young Leopold escaped from school and tried to join the Austrian army under a false name only to be recovered by his father after a week and taken home. However, in 1918, he was drafted in the army; but a few weeks later, the Austrian Empire collapsed and Leopold returned to Vienna where he joined the University of Vienna to study history of art and philosophy. The Vienna years (1918-20) were full of new experiences. The city was then the intellectual and cultural centre of Europe where the views of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Ludwig Wittgenstein tilled the air. But Leopold had a restless nature. In the summer of 1920, he travelled all over Central Europe, doing "all manner of short-lived jobs".¹

He arrived in Berlin in 1920 and found work with the famous director, F. W. Murnau, as temporary assistant for two months. Shortly after this, he was able to secure a contract with a friend for writing a film scenario. Then he spent a year wandering in various cities of Central Europe. One day he spotted Maksim Gorky's wife on a secret mission to solicit aid from the West for a Brobdingnagian famine ravaging Soviet Russian, and succeeded in interviewing her; this 'first-class scoop' led to his promotion as a journalist.

In the spring of 1922, Leopold received a letter from his uncle Dorian, his mother's youngest brother, who was then the head of a mental hospital in Jerusalem, inviting him to come and live in his 'delightful old Arab stone house'. He accepted the invitation. The same year, he became a correspondent for *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers of Germany and Europe. During his stay in the East, Leopold travelled extensively, visiting Cairo, 'Ammān, Jerusalem, Syria (which then included Lebanon as well) and Turkey.

Toward the end of 1923, Leopold was back in Vienna, it was around this time that a reconciliation with his father (who had wanted him to get a Ph.D.) took place and he gained reputation of being an expert on Arab and Middle Eastern affairs. He was given a contract to write a book, *Unromantisches Morgenland* (The Unromantic East).

He finished the book in 1924 but it did not sell well. In spring he went back to the Middle East, first stopping at Cairo where he spent some time with Mustafā al-Marāghi, the future Shaikh of Al-Azhar. He tried to learn Arabic. In the summer of the same year, he travelled to 'Ammān, Damascus, Tripoli and Aleppo, then to Baghdad and to the Kurdish mountains, to 'that strangest of all lands' Iran and 'to the old

¹ For these details, see his *The Road to Mecca*.

mountains and steppes' of Afghanistan. On a winter day in Afghanistan, he was told by a man: 'But thou art a Muslim, only thou dost not know it thyself'. He also travelled to Kabul, Ghazni, Kandahar and Herat.

Early in 1926, he was homebound via Merv, Samarkand, Bukhara and Tashkent and thence across the Turkoman steppes to the Urals and Moscow. Crossing the Polish frontier, he arrived in Frankfurt. Upon his return, he delivered a series of lectures at the Academy of Geopolitics in Berlin. He married Elsa, 41, a widow with a nine year old son, resigned from *Frankfurter Zeitung* and signed contracts to write for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of Zürich, the *Telegraaf* of Amsterdam and the *Kölnische Zeitung* of Cologne.

In September 1926, while travelling in the Berlin subway with Elsa, twenty-six year old Leopold Weiss had a powerful experience during which he became aware of the spiritual torments of his fellow travellers, he came home and found his copy of the Qur'an at his desk, still open where he had left it. His eyes fell on the open page where he read *Surah At-Takāthur*. The next day sought out an Indian friend, the head of the small Muslim community in Berlin, and embraced Islam; Elsa followed a few weeks later.

Thus Leopold Weiss became Muhammad Asad. His father and sister strongly disapproved the conversion and broke off the relationship. The same year, Asad, Elsa and her son Heinrich Ahmad Schiemann, went for *Hajj*. They travelled by ship. Shortly after reaching Makkah, Elsa died. Asad was devastated.

A few weeks later, he met Prince Faysal in the library who invited him to the Royal palace. This started his life-long relationship with Al-Sa'ūd family. Around 1928, he married Munira bint Hussein As-Shammari of the As-Shammari tribe from Haa'il. During these years in Saudi Arabia, he worked on early Islamic history, travelled extensively, lived among the Bedouins, went on a mission to Cyrenaica to assess the needs of the guerrillas fighting the Italians under the command of 'Umar al-Mukhtār and wrote for the European newspapers.

In 1932, a son, Talal Asad, was born. Two years later, Asad left Arabia for India with plans to move on to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia but Muhammad Iqbal persuaded him to stay in India and join the struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

At the outbreak of World War II, Asad was interned by the British government. During the War his sister and father were killed in concentration camps in Auschwitz and Treblinka. He was released after the War and joined the movement for the creation of Pakistan. In 1947,

his ten years of extensive labour on the translation and commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari* was lost during the riots. After the Partition, he moved to Lahore and worked for the Punjab government in the Department of Religious Reconstruction. In the early 1950s, he joined the foreign service and was sent to New York, as Pakistan's representative to the United Nations. In 1954, he resigned from the foreign service, married Pola Hamida, published *The Road to Mecca* and started work on his translation of the Qur'an.

In 1957 (?), Asad moved to Beirut, Lebanon, lived in a hotel, "The Green", and continued his work on the translation. The next year, he made a trip to Pakistan at the invitation of the government of Pakistan (?) to organize a colloquium on Islamic culture. In 1960 (?) he moved to Tangier, Morocco. The next year, he published *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (University of California, Berkeley, USA). In 1964, the first volume of the translation, from *Surah Fatihah* to *At-Towbah* was published as *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muslim World League, Makkah. A committee of scholars appointed to review the translation found it too controversial to be distributed on behalf of the League. Disappointed but not giving up, Asad continued working on the translation.

Twenty-five years after the beginning of his translation, the complete work was published as *The Message of the Qur'an* by Asad's own publishing concern, Dar al-Andalus. Finding him in financial difficulties, the Saudi oil minister, Shaikh Ahmad Zaki Yamāni (his 'brother in spirit'), bought 20,000 copies.

In the same year, a revised edition of *Islam at the Crossroads* was published after forty-six years with a new 'Author's Note' and twelve new footnotes. 1980 also saw the publication of *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* by Dar al-Andalus as well as the publication of the fourth revised edition of *The Road to Mecca*. The next year, *The Road to Mecca* was reprinted. *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam* was republished by Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, with a new preface (one page). In July 1983, Asad was in Pakistan on the invitation of the Government to participate in the meeting of Ansari Commission established to evolve an Islamic form of government. From Pakistan, he went to London (August 3, 1983) before going "home".

In 1985, Asad left Tangier and moved to Lisbon. The same year *The Road to Mecca* was reprinted. In 1986 *Arabia* (Vol. 5 No. 61, September 1986, pp. 48-55) published a cover story on Asad. In 1987, Asad published *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Essays which first

appeared in *'Arafat*). From Tangier, Asad moved to Mijas (Malaga) in the Andalusian province of Spain where he died on February 20, 1992. He was buried in the Muslim cemetery in Granada, Andalusia.

An obituary was published in *Independent Newspaper* (UK) on March 23 and in the *Universal Message* (USA) Vol. 13, No. 12, 1992. *Impact International* (10 April-7 May, 1992) published a profile, "From Leopold Weiss to Muhammad Asad: A Long and Romantic Journey across three continents and two cultures". *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* was reprinted in 1993 by Dar al-Andalus.

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ABDIN CHANDE

SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY IN THE QUR'AN: MUHAMMAD ASAD'S MODERNIST TRANSLATION

Mythic Language in Scripture

The Truth in religious language or representation is conveyed by means of symbols which may take the form of sacred stories or models. These sacred stories are known as myths and serve a prototypical function by presenting inspiring models of great accomplishments.¹ As William Paden put it:

“...myth [however, unlike folktale] posits ostensibly real times and places, real heroes and ancestors, real genealogies and events. No matter how imaginative these may seem to an outsider, mythic settings are intended by the believers to represent an account of the actual world.”²

The function of myth therefore goes beyond merely representing events or characters; it provides paradigms for interpreting the world as it is conceived in each religious tradition.

¹ See the discussion in M. Eliade (1976) “Myths and Mythical Thought”, in: A. Eliot (Ed.) *Myths* (New York: McGraw-Hill); and W. G. Doty (1986) *Mythography: the Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press).

² W. Paden, (1994) *Religious Worlds*, p. 72 (Boston, MA: Beacon Press).

Introduction and Context for this Study

This paper examines sacred stories (symbols, allegories and myths) as they appear in the Qur'an and as they structure the Muslim understanding and interpretation of the world. For our purposes, Muhammad Asad's translation of the Qur'an will provide us with the means with which to explore the 'mythic' language of sacred text. Despite its modernist agenda, it is a coherent translation which brings into sharp focus a particular modernist discourse on the Qur'an.¹ The outcome of this approach is precisely in its style of picking and choosing meanings and interpretations which best suit the modernist project. The paper will provide examples of this from the translation, almost 1000 pages long, over half of which is taken up with footnote explanations, including four appendices at the end. What distinguishes its approach from that of the classical commentators, including modern Muslim translators of the Qur'an in English, is its attempt to explicate the 'mythic' language of scripture as embodied in certain sacred stories/miracles which for Asad have a purely metaphorical signification. He believes therefore (and this is what makes his translation controversial within the Muslim community) that the Qur'an contains legendary accounts or pre-Islamic antecedents (both Judeo-Christian and Arab) which serve certain functions.

Asad's Qur'anic Hermeneutics

Asad attempts to interpret the Qur'an for the modern world in

¹ Muhammad Asad was an Austrian-born Jew (1900-92) who converted to Islam in 1926 and changed his name from Leopold Weiss to Muhammad Asad. He spent a quarter of a century of study, work and travel in the Middle East before settling down for several years, in the newly established nation of Pakistan to work for 'the cultural revival of the Muslim community'. It was Dr. Muhammad Iqbal who had convinced him to do this. Asad lived in many countries and regions of the world including the Middle East, North Africa, the US and Western Europe and he spent his last years in Spain. He established himself as a respected Islamic scholar and is the author of a number of works on Islam including *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934) (Lahore), *The Road to Mecca* (1954) (New York: Simon & Schuster), *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (1961) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) and a book on Hadith. His monumental work, *The Message of the Qur'an* (1980) (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus), is based on a lifetime of study and many years of living in Saudi Arabia.

terms of both the linguistic usage prevalent at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an and contemporary disciplines such as hermeneutics and psychological and socio-anthropological methods, which he brings to bear on certain texts dealing with matters of a supernatural nature. He does so from a modernist perspective (which has been vying or, more accurately, struggling for acceptance among Muslims during the last couple of centuries),¹ with the purpose of explaining the Qur'an in terms relevant to the world in which we live. To prepare his readers to accept what lies ahead Asad quotes in a rather self-serving way the Prophetic tradition to the effect that differences of opinion among the learned in the Muslim community are not only an outcome of divine grace but also, and by implication, the basis of all progress in human thinking.²

Another factor to note is that his basic approach to interpretation is grounded in the belief that all the Qur'anic injunctions and exhortations (the ethical message) should be viewed together as one integral whole. The Qur'an provides general principles which are presented for sermonic and didactic purposes. This means, for instance, that its references to historical circumstances and events should not be taken literally as constituting a factual record, but as being illustrations of the human condition.³ Moreover, as he points out, the preoccupation by classical commentators with the historical occasion when a particular verse was revealed should not be allowed to obscure the underlying purpose of a verse and its relevance to the total message of the Qur'an. This is something he thought that they sometimes lost sight of in their explanations and unwarranted details to embellish the Qur'anic narrative. One needs to be clear about the Qur'anic perspective or the characteristic approach it takes to its subject-matter.

Finally, he is of the view that in the interpretation of scripture, and especially of such narratives as the creation, one should be informed

¹ The modernists pose a challenge to both traditional Islam (Islam as it is practiced in various regions of the Muslim world) and revivalist Islam (which emphasizes a return to scripture, attacks deviations from Islamic doctrine, emphasizes the past and calls on modernity in the name of this past). Modernist Islam also rejects customary practices but, and more significantly, it calls upon the past in the name of modernity. What this means is that Islam in the twentieth century went through a process of redefining itself in response to both internal and external developments.

² See Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, p. viii. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Asad in this study will be to this English translation of the Qur'an.

³ *ibid.*, p. vii.

by insights from the modern disciplines. This would be the basis for making such narratives comprehensible to people of the modern era. He emphasizes the rationality of Islam which went hand in hand with his intellectual approach to religion.

Muhammad Asad's hermeneutical quest to unlock the meaning of the Qur'anic text lies precisely in his contention that the Qur'an contains mythic material which should not be taken literally as accounts of actual historical incidents. What Muslims have to do is to step back and reflect on this material in the light of the underlying Qur'anic message as it is revealed in its ethical and social teachings. This task is made easier by the fact that the Qur'an places a lot of stress on reason,¹ which is the key to understanding the meaning of its text. This means (according to him) that every Qur'anic verse/statement is directed to reason and therefore must be comprehensible. This is what lies behind the Qur'anic assertion that it contains two types of verses: those (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) whose meaning is clear and comprehensible in the literal sense (this applies to most of its text), and others (*mutashābihāt*) whose meaning is allegorical or symbolic (Q. 3:7).

Asad would be the first to admit that while the former (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) constitute the essence of the scripture, the latter, through generalized metaphors on metaphysical subjects,² represent that sector of reality which lies beyond human experience. Given that the metaphysical ideas of religion relate to *al-ghayb* (the unseen, intangible realities),³ the only way they could be successfully conveyed to us (according to him) is through loan-images derived from our actual—physical or mental—experiences.⁴ The limitations of human language to grasp, for instance, God's Being, necessarily call for representation (or 'translation' as he puts it) of God's activity or creativeness into categories of thought (such as God's 'wrath', 'condemnation', 'love',

¹ Muhammad Asad was heavily influenced by Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh's modernist thought, especially his Qur'an commentary entitled *Tafsir al-manār*, which was prepared by 'Abduh's pupil, Rashid Riḍā.

² Allegorical passages deal with metaphysical subjects such as God's attributes, the ultimate meaning of time and eternity, the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgement, paradise and hell, the nature of beings known as angels and so on. These all fall under the category of *al-ghayb*. See Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, pp. 66-67.

³ This translation of the word *al-ghayb* by Asad is derived by him from the Mu'tazila Qur'an commentator, al-Zamakhshari.

⁴ Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, p. 989.

etc.) which man can fathom. Asad's interpretive quest, however, is not so much aimed at deciphering *al-ghayb*, that is, metaphysical subjects such as God's attributes and the Day of Judgement, as it is to comprehend those passages of the Qur'an which are expressed in allegorical language about the human condition.

To illustrate his point, he explains that the Prophet's 'night journey' (Q. 17:1) from Mecca to Jerusalem followed by the 'ascension' to heaven (a two-part mystical experience) is interpreted by the majority of Muslim scholars to denote a physical occurrence, whereas a minority (including 'A'isha, the Prophet's widow) saw it as a purely spiritual event/happening. Asad accepts the latter position on the evidence that the Prophetic traditions indicate that the Prophet met a number of deceased prophets in Jerusalem as well as in heaven. Furthermore, on the Night Journey the Prophet, accompanied by Gabriel, is supposed to have encountered an old woman who was/represented the mortal world; people sowing and harvesting unceasingly (symbolic of the fighters in God's cause), others having their heads shattered by rocks repeatedly (the neglectors of prayer) and still others eating raw meat and throwing away cooked meat (the adulterers).¹ For Asad these are clearly highly allegorical descriptions meant to teach certain moral lessons and should not be taken as representing actual 'physical' occurrences involving the body. Rather, the Prophet had an out of the body mystical experience (no less real/objective than anything experienced by the body) in which his soul was free to travel through time and space to embrace phenomena of a separate reality. The Prophet's soul then condensed such phenomena within symbolic perceptions of great intensity which he later conveyed to his companions by means of figurative expressions.²

Miracle Narratives in the Qur'an: Myth or Reality?

Muhammad Asad is very careful in his Qur'anic translation to support his views or interpretations with references to the great classical Qur'an commentators such as al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathir and Zamakhshari. Where he parts company with them, however, is when it comes to some miracles of the prophets for which he seeks explanation in the pre-

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 996-998.

² *ibid.*, Asad quotes from Ibn al-Qayyim's *Zād al-ma'ād II*, who wrote on the Prophet's spiritual ascension.

Islamic usage of words for idiomatic purposes. Thus the miracles of Jesus which are mentioned in chapters Q. 3:49 and 5:110 (creating a bird out of clay and breathing life into it, healing the blind and the leper and bringing the dead to life by God's leave) are given metaphorical interpretation by him. In a belabored interpretation, for instance, he comments on Jesus' 'miracle' of creating a bird (or 'destiny' as he translates it) as follows:

"Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of humble clay of their lives he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny, and that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God's leave and by the strength of their faith."¹

He also interprets 'the healing of the blind and the leper' as a metaphorical description of an inner regeneration of people who were spiritually diseased and blind to the truth. Yet, his interpretive method falls short of explaining away as mythical the miraculous birth of Jesus without the agency of a father. In any case, the miracles of David, Solomon and Abraham are also given symbolic interpretation by him. In one instance he argues that to understand the Qur'anic verses (Q. 21:68-9; 29:24) as referring to Abraham's miraculous survival or escape after being thrown into the fire is an unwarranted reading of the text by the classical commentators whose interpretation, in his opinion, is embellished with Talmudic legends.² For him the Qur'an does not mention anywhere that Abraham was, in fact, thrown into the fire.

Clearly, therefore, Asad's translation of the Qur'an is quite controversial and breaks with the received tradition of the classical Qur'an commentators. Just as Muhammad Haykal applies what he calls the 'scientific approach' to the study of the life of the Prophet (thereby rejecting the miracles that are attributed to the Prophet by the Muslim imagination), Asad seeks to explicate the 'mythic' language of scripture/sacred stories. The difference lies, however, in the fact that Asad does not reject Qur'anic miracles (neither would Haykal) but seeks to explain them in a rational way to free them from their mythic context.

¹ *ibid.*, p. 74, nn. 37 and 38.

² *ibid.*, p. 495, n. 64. For Asad there is allegorical allusion to the fire of persecution which Abraham had to suffer.

He believes therefore that the Qur'an contains legendary accounts (for instance, those relating to Solomon's wisdom and magic powers, part of the Judeo-Christian and Arabian lore long before the advent of Islam) which were well suited to serve as a medium for the parabolic exposition of certain eternal truths. The Qur'an, in his 'rationalistic' view, does not deny or confirm the mythical character of such stories; rather, it:

"...uses them as a foil for the idea that God is the ultimate source of all human power and glory, and that all achievements of human ingenuity, even though they may sometimes border on the miraculous, are but an expression of His transcendental creativity."¹

Given this understanding, the Qur'an (Q. 2:102) condemns sorcery and the occult sciences in general (which seek to subvert the order of nature as established by Him) by making reference to Babylon, the home of magic arts, symbolized in the legendary persons, Hārūt and Mārūt.² Similarly, the Qur'an narrates the story of the ants (Q. 27:17-19) due to its association with Solomonic legends which had become firmly embedded in the poetic memories of the Arabs.³ The story indicates to him Solomon's loving compassion for even the humblest of God's creatures.

For Asad the story of the men of the cave (Q. 18:9-26), which is Christian or even pre-Christian in origin according to one view,⁴ refers to pious believers who withdrew into a secluded cave (to escape persecution) and remained there miraculously asleep for as long as three centuries before they woke up. For him this story represents a powerful allegory relating to a movement which played an important role in Jewish religious history in the period before and after the advent of Jesus. More specifically, the story refers to the ascetic Essene Brotherhood (to which he believes Jesus may have belonged), some branches of which (known today after the discovery of the Dead Sea

¹ *ibid.*, p. 498, n. 77.

² *ibid.*, pp. 21-22, n. 83. See also his introductory remarks to chapter 27, *al-Naml* (The Ants), which appears on p. 756.

³ *ibid.*, p. 576, introductory remarks to the chapter *al-Naml*.

⁴ Asad here follows Ibn Kathir's theory that, since this story was accepted by Madinan Jews (who lived apart from the Christians and had no friendly communion with them), we may assume that it was essentially Jewish in origin, *ibid.*, pp. 438-439, n. 7.

Scrolls as the 'Qumran community') lived in self-imposed solitude in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. The piety of these men and their mode of life so impressed their contemporaries that their moral purity became allegorized into the story of the men of the cave. The Qur'an uses this legend in a parabolic sense to indicate/represent: the power of God to resurrect or 'awaken' the dead/'asleep'; an allegory of the piety that makes men withdraw from a wicked world and keep their faith pure; and God's power to bestow a spiritual awakening after a spiritual task was done.¹

Myth and History

The story of Moses and the miraculous escape of his people and the doom of Pharaoh and his forces (Q. 10:90) is told with reference to both historical and legendary events which are meant to bring out a particular ethical lesson.² Furthermore, in the parable of Moses and his quest for knowledge (Q. 18:60-82) the 'fish' signifies divine knowledge while 'the juncture of the two seas' where he meets the mysterious sage 'al-Khidr' represents the two streams of knowledge (inductive and intuitive/mystic insight which goes beyond surface appearance).³ According to Asad, innumerable legends have grown up in the course of time regarding this parable; in addition many early commentators attempted to identify the juncture of the two seas with an actual physical location. What is important for Asad, however, is the fact that what human beings cannot comprehend (since appearance and reality do not always coincide as the story illustrates) the Qur'an attempts to communicate by means of metaphor and allegory with respect to all that pertains to *al-ghayb*. Similarly, in the allegory of Dhu al-Qarnayn/the Two-horned One (Q. 18:83-98), who was endowed with both worldly power and spiritual strength, Asad rejects the identification both of this spiritual personage with Alexander the Great (not known for adherence to monotheism) and of a place 'between the two mountain-barriers', which the Two-horned One visited, with the Caucasus, as most of the early commentators do. This story is a parabolic discourse on faith and ethics, with a particular focus on the problem of worldly power.⁴ While

¹ *ibid.*

² *ibid.*, p. 305, n. 110.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 448-449, n. 67 with reference to Baydāwi.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 451-452, n. 81.

he accepts the Qur'anic reference to Yājūj and Mājūj (Gog and Magog) as referring to the Mongols and Tartars in the context of the Day of Judgement (a Prophetic tradition predicted of the great Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century which wrought much havoc and destroyed the 'Abbāsid empire), the purely allegorical meaning of these terms is also possible. In the latter case the terms apply to social catastrophes which would create a lot of destruction before the coming of the Last Hour.¹ Asad also considers Luqmān as being a mythical figure (similar to al-Khidr) who in Arabian tradition is a prototype of the sage who shuns worldly honors and strives for inner perfection. His story (Q. 31:12-19) serves as a vehicle for some of the admonitions seeking to inculcate or nurture proper behavior.² The case, however, is stronger: that he was, in fact, a real person of extraordinary spiritual insights (he could even have been a prophet) who is not credited with the performance of miracles. Yet, Asad neither entertains this idea nor hints at the possibility that, for instance, Mary (as Frithjof Schuon suggested in one of his books) was a prophetess, judging by the fact that not only did an angel speak to her but God had specifically chosen her for a special role as the mother of Jesus.

Asad also tackles some verses of the Qur'an which are difficult to comprehend given our modern understanding of, for instance, projected life expectancy both for the modern man and the prehistoric man of the age of *homo sapiens* or even the *homo sapiens* period. More specifically, the Qur'anic reference to Noah (Q. 29:14) as having lived or dealt among his people for 950 years calls for an explanation. He considers this to be a repetition of the biblical legend (here time itself has been mythicized), which serves to indicate that the duration of a prophet's mission has nothing to do with its success or failure as 'all true guidance is God's guidance'.³ Moreover, with respect to the story of Noah (after the majority of his people had rejected his teachings) being asked by God to build a ship/ark and to carry a pair of each kind of animal on board (Q. 11:36-48), Asad understands the latter to be a reference to domesticated animals already in his possession and not to all animals as the biblical narrative has it.⁴ The immense flood which followed (and is described in both the Qur'an and the Bible as well as in the myths of ancient Greece, Sumeria and Babylonia) pointed to the

¹ *ibid.*, p. 454, n. 100.

² *ibid.*, p. 628, n. 12.

³ *ibid.*, p. 608, n. 12.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 319, n. 63.

huge valley now covered by the Mediterranean Sea which, through torrential rain, spread to present-day Syria and parts of Iraq.¹ This disastrous deluge (probably going back to the Ice Age and preserved in the flood myths) did not affect the whole world (as the biblical story would have us believe) but was limited to the territory of Noah's people.²

In the story of Adam and Eve in which Satan caused them to eat from the 'tree of life eternal' (*al-*khuld**) the forbidden tree is an allegory of the limits which the Creator has set to man's desires and actions.³ He also translates the term 'satans' (*shayāṭīn*) appearing in the Qur'an (Q. 7:30) as meaning in this context 'evil impulses',⁴ or propensities that are in the hearts of those who do not truly believe in God (Q. 14:22).⁵ Even Satan's 'rebellion', by refusing to make the courtesy bow to Adam, has a purely symbolic importance and is an outcome of a specific function assigned to him by God.⁶ The whole creation drama in the Qur'anic narrative in which Adam and Eve figure is considered by Asad to be an allegory of human destiny.⁷ The story has symbolic meaning intended to express certain truths about human nature or the human condition. For instance, after the fall from grace Adam and Eve became 'conscious of their nakedness' (Q. 20:118-19 and 7:22), implying that this is an allegory of the state of innocence in which man lived before the fall.⁸ In that state of innocence man lived, like all other animals, in the light of his instincts alone; however, with moral and intellectual development/growth of consciousness—symbolized by the willful act of disobedience to God's command—he became endowed with the moral free will which distinguishes him from other sentient beings.⁹

As regards human development, the phrase 'And God has caused you to grow out of the earth in [gradual] growth' (Q. 71:17) or

¹ *ibid.*, n. 62.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, p. 484, n. 106.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 206, n. 20.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 375, n. 31. He quotes Rāzi, who indicates that the real Satan is man's own complex desires which Satan is able to tap into and that way is only able to reach man's soul by means of insinuations.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 9, n. 26.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 205, n. 16.

⁸ *ibid.*, n. 14.

⁹ *ibid.*, n. 16.

successive stages (Q. 71:14) is interpreted by Asad to mean that humans have evolved from the same organic and inorganic substances as are found on the earth. The second meaning of this phrase is that it alludes to the human species, which, starting from the most primitive organism living on earth, has gradually evolved or ascended to ever higher stages of development until it has finally attained that complexity of body, mind and soul evident in the human being.¹ This is a clear endorsement of the theory of evolution albeit with a creationist twist to it. The traditional Muslim view, on the other hand, which upholds the belief of God's 'creation' (of not just the first organism, but also of the first human) rejects the theory of evolution from one species to another, although it would more likely accept morphological evolution within the human species to be an established fact.

With regard to the Christian story of Jesus' crucifixion, the Qur'an categorically denies such an event (Q. 4:157-8). Yet, Muslim commentators have come up with fanciful legends of God's substituting for Jesus a person, Judas, who resembled him and was crucified in his place. The Qur'anic phrase 'but it only seemed to them so' (Q. 4:158) is explained by Asad as follows:

"...in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus a legend had somehow grown up (possibly under the then-powerful influence of Mithraistic beliefs) to the effect that he had died on the cross in order to atone for the 'original sin' with which mankind is allegedly burdened."

Similarly, he does not accept the interpretation of the rest of the verse 'For, of a certainty, they did not slay him: nay God exalted him unto Himself' as referring to Jesus being 'taken up' bodily into heaven during his lifetime. Rather, following Muhammad 'Abduh, he interprets the phrase 'God exalted him unto Himself' as denoting elevation to the realm of God's grace, a blessing in which all prophets partake.² The Christian belief in the ascension of Jesus (which is mythical and represents his exaltation by God) is what has probably influenced Muslims to believe that Jesus did not die but went to heaven. Having disposed of the view that Jesus was raised bodily into heaven the verse (Q. 3:55) 'Lo! God said: "O Jesus! Verily I shall cause thee to die, and

¹ *ibid.*, p. 897, n. 10.

² *ibid.*, pp. 134-135, n. 172.

shall exalt thee unto me” ’ would probably be considered by him as conclusive evidence that Jesus did, in fact, die (as no mortal lives forever). What then should one make of the Muslim belief (which is extra-Qur’anic) that Jesus will return before the end of time? Was this millennial belief or expectation borrowed by Muslims from Jewish and Christian legends about the return (for Christians) or coming (for Jews) of the Messiah?¹ Asad (while he does not say this explicitly in his translation) would argue that the Shi’a were probably influenced by these legends in their belief in the return of their twelfth Imam, while the Sunnis (themselves influenced by the Shi’a) also believe in the coming of the Mahdi although he is not such a pivotal figure in Sunnism. In fact, belief in the Mahdi is not an article of faith in Sunni Islam, which leaves the door open for those who may choose to be agnostic about this elusive figure.

Clearly, therefore, the Mahdi is a mythical figure projected into the future and is a model of the coming to terms with a materialistic world which is far removed from the idealic age of the Prophet. Asad, for instance, as one would expect, explains the eschatological traditions about the coming of Dajjāl (the anti-messiah figure) in a purely metaphorical way. The Dajjāl, as the one-eyed, is characterized by the materialistic civilizations which are this-worldly and are ‘blind’ or oblivious of the hereafter—the love of this fleeting life at the expense of the life to come (Q. 75:20-1), with the power to speak at one end of the earth and be heard elsewhere (representing the power of satellite), who would be worshipped (the global trend to emulate Western materialistic culture), who would be able to make rain fall (referring to cloud seeding) and so on.²

¹ A well respected Muslim scholar, Shaykh Taha al-‘Alwani, a member of the Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, chairman of the Fiqh Council of North America and president of the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, is on record (in one of his lectures at the School of Islamic Social Sciences in Leesburg) as having raised doubts about the belief in the return of Jesus. The belief in his return serves mythical functions if anything.

² See Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, pp. 292-293. This book has as its narrative frame an account of his actual journey from the Iraq-Saudi frontier across the desert to Mecca, the spiritual center of Islam, but also outlines a series of flashbacks to earlier experiences, including his journey into the discovery of Islam. This book emphasizes the rationality of Islam and his intellectual approach to the problem of religion.

Conclusion

My treatment of Asad's approach to Qur'anic miracle stories has not been exhaustive. I do believe, however, that the examples I have provided sufficiently bring out his main arguments and illustrate his attempts at an exposition of Qur'anic teachings in the light of modern scientific thought. As a result of this approach he places the miracle stories within the time frame of the Prophet's society when these legends had widespread acceptance. These sacred narratives (with which Western/orientalist scholarship has been so deeply preoccupied for quite a long time to explain the origins or 'sources' of Islam) have provided the framework within which the Islamic message has filtered. For Asad it is the perspective which the Qur'an places on its material (be it of Judeo-Christian or Arab origin) more than anything else which is important for the presentation of its overall message. These myths serve the prototypical function of presenting inspiring models. Therefore, while mythic settings to believers represent an account of the actual world, to him they are simply symbols which serve metaphorical functions.

It is obvious how profoundly Asad has been influenced by the modernist school of thought (Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh in particular), which has tended to be rather diffused and has spawned all manner of groups or trends extending all the way into secularism. Modernist thought has found a more ready home among Western educated/influenced secularists than among traditionally trained Muslims or Muslims who are active in Islamic movements, institutes and mosque centers all over the world. Among the modernists, though, one should clearly distinguish between the views of those scholars such as Asad and Fazlur Rahmān whose principle of interpretation sees the Qur'an as a divinely inspired book and others such as Abu Zaid and Muhammad Arkoun who want to see the Qur'an subjected to the critical methods of so-called 'higher criticism' developed by Western scholars of the Bible. The latter have called for a complete rethinking of the Qur'an for the present age and are struggling (since they write from the periphery) to create a social and cultural space (already dominated by

Islamists as Arkoun complained) in which they can insert their critical approach.¹

Is Asad just a voice in the wilderness or is he a spokesperson of a quite definite spirit of the age? He has certainly challenged Muslims to reconsider the miracles/sacred stories in the Qur'an in their mythic context. His discussion, however, raises a number of issues too. Does not denying the possibility of some of these miracles limit God's powers in some way? How does one know for sure, for instance, whether a particular event described in the Qur'an is as it has happened or whether it is a myth? Asad provides no guide for this.

The dilemma for Asad is this. Are some alleged historical events, such as Jesus' miracles, examples of myth whereas others are not? Why not? Are sacred stories of the mythic genre untenable today (when, in fact, most Muslims believe in them anyway)? Are humans not subject to the intervention of powers outside of themselves? Does this understanding of miracles limit or deny God's influence in human activities? Asad writes as if he is certain that God never bends physical facts into special conformity with the divine will or intention. His objection seems to be that miracles violate the realities of natural science.

There are varieties of myths and we should distinguish among them. First, there are those that relate to creation drama and the fall of man which we cannot do without in our understanding of transcendental matters. Here Asad is probably on solid ground when discussing such events as being clearly mythical.

Then there are myths (such as Solomon's magic powers) which Asad believes are derived from legendary embellishments and are vehicles utilized by the Qur'an to advance certain lessons/teachings. Other myths are historical narratives (such as the story of Moses in Egypt) which are presented in mythical form. The imagery of these myths is conditioned by the views of the people at any given time. What about the virgin birth of Jesus—is this a myth or reality? He does not commit himself on this question. But why are Jesus' miracles considered mythical by him whereas his Virgin birth is not discussed at all in these terms? Is it a myth which symbolizes the unique circumstances of Jesus or does this refer to a reality that is difficult to understand? (There is, in fact, a unique combination of history and myth in the Qur'anic telling of

¹ See, for instance, M. Arkoun, (1998) "Rethinking Islam today", in: C. Kurzman (Ed.) *Liberal Islam*, pp. 205-206 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Jesus' story.) To make his interpretive quest consistent he cannot select certain features of the Qur'an and ignore others. How are we to know the exact line of demarcation between what is mythic (metaphorical) and what is real (miraculous events)? If the myths of the Qur'an have to be interpreted, what is to be the source of that interpretation—intellectual fashions of the day? Should not the interpretation itself be derived from the Qur'an?

The above notwithstanding, this is a far-ranging exploration of the Qur'anic worldview and reflects careful scholarship, familiarity with classical works and interesting and stimulating insights into the Qur'an. It is quite an unfortunate and regrettable fact that Asad's brilliant and monumental study of the Qur'an has not received as extensive a readership as have the translations of Pickthall and Yusuf 'Ali.

(in: *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 15, no. 1, January 2004, pp. 79-89.)

درس قرآن کا سلسلہ میں آج پندرہ سو سو دنوں سے دیا ہے میں خود بھی اس کی کئی رسالہ
 میں کسوس کر رہا ہوں۔ ٹر اے ٹک میں نے اس کی جراثیم اس لیے نہیں کی ہے کہ مجھے پرکھنا
 بہ نسبت زیادہ ہے اور تحقیق وسطیٰ اور ضرور وہی ہا وقت کم ہوتا ہے۔ ذرا اس بار میں
 کہ کئی جراثیم اور نئے نئے کہ المیناں میں ہر وقت ان کے واسطے تفسیری معانی ہا ایک
 سلسلہ شروع ہا کر دیا۔ سہ سہی طور پر قرآن کی تفسیر کچھ عورتوں کو فہم ہونے لگا۔
 مگر قرآن کے لیے جن امور کی ضرورت ہے ان کا ایک معنی میں جمع کرنا
 تو مشکل ہے۔ اس لیے ایک ایک چیز پر ایک ایک معنی لکھا جاسکتا ہے۔ کہ میں ان
 معانی کو جمع کرنا ایک کتاب کی صورت میں شائع کیا جاتا تو قرآن مجید کے لیے ایک
 مفید معنی ہا جاتا۔ میں ایک طرح سے ارادہ رکھتا تھا کہ اس قسم کی ایک مستقل
 کتاب بنوں۔ ٹر اب کتاب کی تصنیف تو مشکل نظر آتی ہے۔ زیادہ بہتر میں
 ہے کہ ایک ایسے معانی لکھے شروع کر دیے جائیں۔ ان کے واسطے تفسیر یہ سلسلہ
 شروع ہوگا۔

محمد اسد صاحب کے حیدرآباد میں ایک مرتبہ مل چکا ہوں۔ ان کی کتاب
 Islam on the Cross roads اور ترجمہ صحیح بخاری دونوں میری نظر سے گزری ہیں۔ میرا خیال ہے
 کہ دور جب یہ اس اسم کو جسے غنائم اور سپ سے ملے ہیں ان میں یہ سب سے زیادہ
 قیمتی چیز ہے۔ اس اسم کی اسپرٹ اسپرٹ میں پوری طرح حوالہ کرنا چاہیے اور
 اس اسم کو اس دن ان علماء سے زیادہ اچھی طرح سمجھا ہے جو پچاس پچاس برس پہلے
 درس و تدریس میں مشغول ہیں۔ اگر یہ شخص آپ کے ادارہ کے لیے لیا جاسکتا
 ہے تو آپ کو بے حد دریاہوں اور نہایت خوش قسمت سمجھتا ہوں۔ اس لیے
 اس کے لیے کوشش کریں۔

Mawlana Mawdudi's letter to Ch. Niaz Ali (1955) in which he has referred Muhammad Asad.

G. E. VON GRUNEBAUM

THE PRINCIPLES OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT IN ISLAM

No statement in the field of history and in the social sciences in general, however analytical in intent and however careful in its documentation, can escape an ambiguity inherent in historical cognition as such which will make it at the same time a presentation of facts and a program, and hence a source of intellectual history yet to be written. The facile charge that no historian can divest himself of bias—a charge too often made in order to discredit uncomfortable insights—needs to be replaced by the acknowledgment that an author's aspiration determines his ability to find and especially to utilize facts in a context relevant thereto.

The aspiration may remain hidden or implicit. The political intent of al-Māwardi's (d. 1058) comprehensive statement on the structure of the Muslim state was brought to light only slightly less than nine hundred years after the author's death, even though we may be certain that his contemporaries were alive not only to the pertinence of Māwardi's theses to their immediate situation but to the programmatic significance of his analysis of the caliphate. The function of a work of history or political science may vary in different contexts of time, environment, and civilization. To Western readers, Māwardi's treatise remains primarily a document of Islamic thinking on the role of the state, and in this sense it represents an objective source for the study of a definite approach to the problem of social organization. In its original context, it must have partaken importantly of the character of a manifesto to form or modify that very approach.

Thus, Mr. Asad's statement on *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* has a double significance. Unlike Māwardi's *Institutes of Rulership (al-Ahkām as-sultāniyya)*, it is frankly presented as a program. This is the moment, Mr. Asad explains, when the Islamic peoples possess the free choice of their destiny; it is now, or perhaps never, that they can become "Islamic polities in the true sense of the word" (p. 1).

Motivated by his awareness of the fleeting uniqueness of the hour, Mr. Asad presents his concept of the Islamic state and attempts to formulate a workable constitution in considerable detail, basing his views on the commonly accepted authoritative sources of Islamic reasoning: the Koranic Revelation and the Sunna, or Tradition, of the Prophet Muhammad. However, his is not the only concept of the Islamic state which is now effective, and hence, from another point of view, his program loses its absoluteness and intellectual autonomy to become one of many pieces of evidence symptomatic of conflicting ideological currents within what is somewhat casually called the Muslim world. The double significance that his book thus acquires for us is enhanced by the fact that the views Mr. Asad expounds are those of a large and influential section of the Muslim public.

His ideas are offered as an objectively and universally valid interpretation of the Muslim message; but the public Mr. Asad wishes to influence is an Islamic one—more specifically, the politically self-conscious Muslim circles of Pakistan. His purpose imposes on him a certain methodological procedure and a manner of presentation that has been developed in this milieu which may be somewhat out of the ordinary to the Western reader. His public is less sensitive to anachronism than ours, after some hundred and fifty years of historicism. The use of the revealed text as the sole cogent proof of an argument imposes techniques of selection and interpretation which would have been familiar to Western discussants of science and religion one or two centuries ago, but which now, on occasion, appear unwarrantedly wilful. The occidental reader should bear in mind that the reinterpretation of scriptural and comparable data to corroborate innovating tendencies and original ideas is, in the intellectual framework of the society to which Mr. Asad addresses himself, the only means to reconcile authority with freedom.

Thus, in effect this book has to be read on three levels simultaneously. It is first and foremost a declarative document. It expounds a view of the state which the author conceives of as an absolute—as the fulfillment of demands on man and society which are implicit in the immutable core of Revelation and Tradition. To Western readers, however, it may represent an attempt to harmonize modern Western-inspired political ideas with the heritage of the Muslim tradition. It is, in this sense, not only an expository but also a confessional document and, in due proportion, to be classified with Calvin's *Institutes* or the *Communist Manifesto*.

But it is equally valuable as a document of present Muslim, or, more precisely, Pakistani thinking on an important matter of immediate, practical urgency. In fact, it deserves to be described as an unusually well-organized and well-phrased statement of a viewpoint that, until very recently, may have been dominant among the educated Islam-conscious intelligentsia in the countries of Arabic tongue as well as in Pakistan.

Finally, the work reflects a certain phase of Westernization; that is, of a more or less deliberate *rapprochement* of the two traditions. This *rapprochement* is sought not only in the political aspiration as such, but also in the method by which it is placed before the reader who is to be convinced that the traditional presuppositions lead naturally to modernistic conclusions, and that these conclusions, in turn, represent the culmination of the true intent of the religious message from which the Islamic heritage developed. The *coincidentia traditionum* validates both—or in a phraseology perhaps more acceptable to the conservative believer, it unveils the infinite wealth of the Muslim revelation by the demonstration that the best of the Western heritage is germinally contained therein.

The manuscript was prepared under the sponsorship of the Haji Anisur Rahman Memorial Society of Karachi, Pakistan, and it was the society's initiative that led the Near Eastern Center of the University of California, Los Angeles, to arrange for its publication. The desire of the society to have it appear in the West bespeaks an understanding of the transcultural significance of the book and the problems with which it deals.

If any conclusion on the editorial policy of the Near Eastern Center may be derived from our undertaking the responsibility for this publication, it is this: We are alive to the manifold functions and roles that scientific thought assumes in varying contexts; and we shall endeavor in future publications to further scholarship by presenting disquisitions as well as documents, while remaining aware that the classification of any given contribution will depend largely on the cultural context in which it is viewed.

(Foreword to Muhammad Asad's book entitled *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, Berkeley—Los Angeles, 1961, by G. E. von Grunebaum, Director, Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles; this 'Foreword' has been deleted in the rev. ed. of the book, published from Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980, by the author—Chaghatai)

مفتوحہ خیال پورہ۔ مسٹر مفتاح نور (پنجاب)
3 اکتوبر

حضرتی - السلام علیکم وعلیٰ اہل البیت۔ خواجہ صاحب نامہ ملا۔ اب فقیرانی
تجزیر سیریا کی کیا جائے گا۔ خیابانی مسودہ فتح آباد کے خیال کے بعد مجھے نہ وہ صواب
ملے گا تو میں اس میں۔ اب ان کا مشورہ ہے کہ یہ لاہور میں ہو۔ آپ کی مجلس شہادت
کی تاریخ اور وہی اظہار صفا مقرر ہو چکی ہے۔ جس کا جس کا آپ کے ہاں وہی ہے۔ اس کے
حدود 10۔ اکتوبر کو صبح کی گھنٹوں کے بعد ہی شروع ہو جائے۔ جس کے تاریخ جو وہی ہے آپ
کو ہی رہے گا۔ حال پورہ شریف لاہور میں ہے۔ اس کا نام ہے۔ اور اس کا قریبی
صاحب کو بھی ہے۔ یہاں کے تاریخ جو کہ لاہور سے قریب خیال میں ہے۔ اس کے
میں ہے۔ اور اس وقت اس کا ادارہ اور آپ کی تو بہت سے ہیں ان کا نام ہے اب
آفرین ضلع لاہور ہے۔ حضور حضور کی دعا ہے کہ صفا میں ہی ہو۔

ہیں۔ اور اس کے خیال سے ہے۔ آپ پر ہے۔ اس کا نام ہے اب فقیرانی کی مجلس شہادت
میں ہے۔ اس میں اپنی لکھی گئی تاریخ ہے۔ اکتوبر 1937ء۔ اور ان
میں ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔

یہ ضلع ہے۔ اس کا نام ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔ اس میں ہے۔
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خواجہ صاحب
نیاں صاحب

Ch. Niaz Ali's letter (3rd Oct. 1937) to Mawlana Mawdudi. The names of Iqbal and Asad are also mentioned.

ERWIN I. J. ROSENTHAL

AN ISLAMIC STATE FOR PAKISTAN?

Naturally, not all advocates of an Islamic state in our time are followers of the *Ikhwan* and their tactics. Nor do the same generalities and the same vagueness of detail characterise all efforts resulting in blueprints. Two treatises devoted to the constitutional framework and to the government and administration of an Islamic state deserve special attention. This is because they supply the theory underlying the attempt to set up an Islamic state in Pakistan, and thus their discussion will naturally lead to the second part of this book illustrating the various aspects of the practical measures to build a modern national state in countries with Muslim majorities where Islam is a problem. In our context it does not matter whether Islam is a central or a mere peripheral problem in the state as long as we preserve, a sense of proportion. But as long as Islam is a factor in such a state it is important to know how those determined that Islam should play a role in public life envisage this role in practice. These treatises are not theoretical speculations; they are conditioned by the practical needs of a state and constitute a programme for political action.

MUHAMMAD ASAD'S PLAN

Muhammad Asad elaborates in his recent book *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* the ideas he propounded not long after the emergence of the state of Pakistan in his essay *Islamic Constitution-Making*. We are here only concerned with the theory of Muhammad Asad, which he formulated in the concrete political situation of a struggling state whose *raison d'être* was Islam and the desire of the majority of Indian Muslims to have their own state where they could live as Muslims. This may explain the use of the term "ideology" by religious and lay leaders and politicians in connection with Islam and state in Pakistan.

The author starts from the thesis that the *Shari'a* is formed by

what Qur'an and Sunnah have commanded, and excludes *Fiqh*, the traditional Islamic law. "Thus, it is the *nusus* [clear textual injunctions] of Qur'an and Sunnah—and only these—that collectively constitute the real, eternal *shari'ah* of Islam." This means that Muhammad Asad only considers as valid and obligatory what is explicitly commanded and forbidden in clear, authoritative, unambiguous terms in the Qur'an. The Sunnah in the form of authentic *Hadith* elaborates and supplements these texts; it is equally authoritative and binding on Muslims, "whereas the far larger area of things and activities which the Law-Giver has left unspecified... must be regarded as allowable (*mubāh*) from the *shar'i* point of view".

He justifies his opinion by claiming the support of the Companions of the Prophet and of outstanding jurists, in particular Ibn Ḥazm. Through the exercise of *ijtihād*, necessary, additional legislation can and must be provided "in consonance with the spirit of Islam". He would *occasionally* refer to legislation of the past, arrived at by *ijtihād*, and stresses the temporary character of all such legislation since it must be bound to the special circumstances of time and place. Yet, it is always "subject to the authority of the irrevocable, unchangeable *shari'ah*". He claims that the ordinances of the Divine Law conform to "the real nature of man and the genuine requirements of human society at any time". It follows from this that the *nusus* are

"in the first instance general principles. ..and, in the second instance, provide for detailed legislation in such matters as are not affected by changes due to man's social development.... whenever changes are indispensable for, human progress (for example, in matters of government, technology, economic legislation...), the *shari'ah* does not stipulate any detailed laws, but either lays down general principles only or refrains from making any legal enactment. And this is where *ijtihādi* legislation rightfully comes in. To be more precise, the legitimate field of the community's law-making activity comprises (a) details in cases and situations where the *shari'ah* provides a general principle but no detailed ruling, and (b) principles *and* details with regard to matters which are *mubāh*..." [pp. 14 f.].

He adduces Surah v, 48, "For every one of you We have ordained a Divine Law and an open road" in support of his contention that "the Law-Giver has conceded to us, within this area, an 'open road'

(*minhāj*) for temporal legislation which would cover the contingencies deliberately left untouched by the *missis* of Qur'an and Sunnah". He pleads for "a return to the realities of Qur'an and Sunnah" as a creative movement in order to find an Islamic solution to the cultural crisis of Islam, and rejects as a destructive movement "the present drift of Muslim society toward Western concepts and institutions" which would spell the ruin of Islam.

He thus rejects the West completely, forgetting that despite its failings and weaknesses its political, social and economic structure are based on precisely those high moral principles which he attributes—exclusively, it seems—to Qur'an and Sunnah. That the West does not live up to its principles surely does not mean that they do not exist or are bad, just as is the case in the Muslim East. Necessary temporal legislation by *ijtihad*—arrived at by going back to what the author terms "the socio-political program of Islam"—takes account, in the light of his just quoted definition, of the prevailing conditions. It would, therefore, be surprising if such legislation were very different from Western efforts at promoting economic wellbeing, social justice and creative leisure for free individuals in the good society.

He is, as we saw, not the only modern Muslim thinker to demand "back to Qur'an and Sunnah" in order to achieve a renewal of Islam in an Islamic state, but he has the merit of attacking the crucial question of the place and scope of Islamic law with clarity and simplicity. He rightly stresses the need to get back and down to fundamentals by cutting through the "many layers of conventional and frequently arbitrary interpretation". He does not stand in awe of tradition as is clear from his claim that

"the outward forms and functions of an Islamic state need not necessarily correspond to any "historical precedent". All that is required of a state in order that it might deservedly be described as "Islamic" is the embodiment in its constitution and practice of those clear-cut, unambiguous ordinances of Islam which have a direct bearing on the community's social, political, and economic life. As it happens, those ordinances are very few and very precisely formulated; and they are invariably of such a nature as to allow the widest possible latitude to the needs of any particular time and social condition."

It would not be fair to hold against this simple programme that

it brushes aside too lightly what we called earlier on the concept of historical continuity. It may well be that the application of this "ideological" plan will result in an Islamic state, but it may seriously be questioned whether it shares with the historical Islamic state—as formulated by the jurists determined to create an ideal pattern in opposition to a quite different political and historical reality—anything but the name. We could only judge if Muhammad Asad's plan had been or would be realised in Pakistan. But in view of his critical examination of Western terminology in itself and when applied (or as he rightly says, misapplied to Islam) it is justified to question the practicability of the programme. For the author is evidently aware that the simplicity of the Islam of the prophet is not unconnected with the economic, social and cultural situation of seventh-century Arabia. Can we establish in the vastly different twentieth century a much more complicated state and society on the basis of an "ideology" formulated then? Assuming this to be possible—and the author's answer to our question would certainly point to the divine character of the *Shari'ah*, the explicit statements of which in general principles and detailed injunctions are eternally valid—can we ignore the development of this Islamic "ideology" through the ages?

Reference, by way of analogy, was made earlier to the Qaraites and their rejection of Rabbinic law and how circumstances forced them to create their own *Halakhah* (corresponding to the *Shari'ah*). This doubt—criticism would be unwarranted—does, however, not impugn the sound principle and bold grasp, unhampered by traditional legal thinking, that characterise Muhammad Asad's programmatic formulations. This is even more true since he acknowledges historical evolution even in the time of the *khulafā rāshidūn* some of whose legal enactments and administrative measures are unconnected with Qur'an and Sunnah, but, he claims, are in conformity with the spirit of Islam.

No doubt it is no accident that the author speaks of community, not of society. Therefore, he sees in the state only a means of promoting the "growth of a community of people who stand up for equity and justice, for right and against wrong—or, to put it more precisely—a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of such social conditions as would enable the greatest possible number of human beings to live, morally as well as physically, in accordance with the natural Law of God, Islam."

This is indistinguishable from the goal of any political philosophy of our time and is not any more Islamic than it is Jewish or

Christian. Islam as the natural law of God is not new either.

He condemns nationalism as opposed to the "fundamental Islamic principle of the equality of all men" and states that Muslim unity must "be of an ideological nature, transcending all considerations of race and origin: a brotherhood of people bound together by nothing but their consciousness of a common faith and a common moral outlook" (p. 32). The tasks he sets an Islamic state are to be met with in every writer, he only expresses them in modern, attractive terms. If the state acts according to all the principles attributed to Islam it "can rightly be described as 'God's vice-gerent on earth'; its foremost duty....consists in enforcing the ordinances of the *shari'ah* in the territories under its jurisdiction" (p. 34). He demands that "the constitution must explicitly lay down that no temporal legislation or administrative ruling, be it mandatory or permissive, shall be valid if it is found to contravene any stipulation of the *shari'ah*" (p. 35). Obedience to legally constituted authority is a religious duty and must be rendered as long as the government acts within the *Shari'ah*. The community must supervise the actions of the government which is, thus, "subject to the people's consent". This popular consent depends on the free choice of the government by the people. This deduction does not seem to be cogent.

He examines the question of where the sovereignty of the state resides and attributes the assertion that it resides in "the people" to Western political theories. He considers this "unrestricted sovereignty on the part of the community as a whole" as un-Islamic as the autocracy Muslims suffered in the past. The reason he gives is that the people's consent in an Islamic state "is but the result of their having accepted Islam as a Divine Ordinance, [therefore] there can be no question of their being endowed with sovereignty *in their own right*". He is here interpreting Islam correctly, in contrast to the advocates of popular sovereignty we discussed before, for example, As-Sammān.

In another place he defines the purpose of the Islamic state as "the establishment of Islamic Law as a practical proposition in man's affairs" (pp. 39 f.). While the non-Muslim citizen is to enjoy full religious, cultural and social freedom, he admits that "without a certain amount of differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim there can be no question of our ever having an Islamic state or states in the sense envisaged in Qur'an and Sunnah". In practice, this means that "they may not be entrusted with the key position of leadership". A non-Muslim could not "work wholeheartedly for the ideological objectives of Islam; nor in fairness could such a demand be made of him" (pp. 40 f.). It is

difficult to reconcile this with the lofty, universal objectives of the Islamic state as defined above (pp. 30, 33). Moreover, Qur'an and Sunnah envisage a community of believers, not necessarily a state.

By mistaking Islam for an ideology like Communism or Fascism, Muhammad Asad introduces a foreign, alien concept which results in qualifying and restricting the equality of non-Muslim citizens as well as the universal application of Islamic principles. Since, however, he includes in these principles the duty to "propagate the teachings of Islam to the world at large" (p. 33), he possibly makes their general application contingent on conversion to Islam. This seems to be borne out by his assertion—in connection with the restriction of authority and policy-making in an Islamic state:

"if we are resolved to make Islam the dominant factor in our lives, we must have the moral courage to declare openly that we are not prepared to endanger our future by falling into line with the demands of that spurious "liberalism" which refuses to attribute any importance to men's religious convictions; and that, on the contrary, the beliefs a man holds are far more important to us than the mere accident of his having been born or naturalized in our country." [p. 41]

Even if "religious convictions" are understood in the context of the religious and political unity of Islam, "ideology" seems to be a misnomer since it is a strictly political term without any connection with religion.

That the head of state should be a Muslim is a matter of course; but who should have authority to enact the necessary *ijtihādi* legislation? The Qur'an decides this by the principle of consultation (*shūra*), as stated in Surah XII, 38, *amrūhum shūra baynahum*, which the author translates by "Their [the believers'] communal business (*amr*) is to be [transacted in] consultation among themselves". He interprets this to mean that all temporal legislation has been entrusted to the community by *ijtihād*, the "exercise of independent reasoning in consonance with the spirit of Islamic Law and the best interests of the nation" (pp. 43 f.).

It is to be noted that, whereas the author before demanded *ijtihād* to be "in consonance with the spirit of Islam", he now simultaneously seems to widen and to restrict its scope by adding a further most important principle which was emphasised by Rashid Riḍā—with whom Muhammad Asad has much in common. This is the

principle of *maslaha*, "the best interests of the nation", but at the same time "Islam" in the phrase "the spirit of Islam" has now become "Islamic Law", unless the two are coterminous? The Qur'anic verse about *shura* is to be understood "as the fundamental, operative clause of all Islamic thought relating to statecraft" (p. 44). It means "that the legislative powers of the state must be vested in an assembly chosen by the community specifically for this purpose". By "community" is meant the whole community, and the Legislative Assembly to which he gives the traditional Muslim name of *majlis ash-shura* "must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women" (p. 45). Such an assembly must, in his view, be elected "by means of the widest possible suffrage, including both men and women". This is demanded by present circumstances which can and must legitimately be taken into account for all legislation outside of and additional to the *Shari'ah*.

Muhammad Asad speaks throughout of the community which, no doubt, means the community of believers. Does this imply that he excludes non-Muslims both from voting for and sitting in the Legislative Assembly? This would appear to be a logical deduction, especially in view of the qualifications he stipulates for the members of the *majlis ash-shura* whose work only relates

"to matters of public concern, and more particularly to matters which have not been regulated in terms of law by the *nusūs* of Qur'an and Sunnah. Whenever the interests of the community call for a legislative enactment, the *majlis* must first look into the context of the *shari'ah* for a guiding general principle of law bearing on the problem under consideration. If such a general principle is forthcoming, it falls within the scope of the legislature to draw up an enactment in consonance with the established *shari'i* principle. But very often the *majlis* will be confronted with problems on which the *shari'ah* is entirely silent...In such instances it is for the *majlis* to devise the requisite legislation, taking only the spirit of Islam and the community's welfare into consideration. All this presupposes...that the members of the *majlis* are not only possessed of a good working knowledge of the *nusūs*..., but are also people of understanding and insight... alive to the sociological requirements of the community and worldly affairs in general: in other words, education and maturity are indispensable qualifications for election to the *majlis ash-shura*." [pp. 47 f.]

It may be argued that, since the Muslims are in a majority in the state, this is reasonable. But it is not only contrary to the author's insistence on "the fundamental Islamic principle of the equality of all men"—after all he equates Islam with "the natural Law of God", and we are all God's children, irrespective of creed and colour—but it is also incompatible with such a state's membership of the United Nations which requires adherence to the Bill of Human Rights. The author's restriction of voting for and membership of the *majlis* to the Muslim community is not only differentiation which he admits as inevitable in his "ideological" state, it is discrimination. For, the minorities are as much, if not more, affected by decisions concerning public matters as the majority.

This clearly shows the ineluctable choice a modern Muslim nation-state must make between Islamic principles, determining its structure and policy, and Islamic law regulating the public life of the state which includes non-Muslims in addition to laicist and secularist Muslims. For, there can be no different standards and laws for different sections of the citizenry of a unitary state in matters of public concern. The blessings of Western political and social democracy are apparently reserved in Muhammad Asad's Islamic state to the Muslim majority.

In the matter of the relations between the Executive and the Legislature he insists on their interdependence, since independent existence and functioning would be against Islam. The head of state (*amir*)

"by virtue of being the focal point of all *amr* cannot be merely an ordinary member of the *majlis*, but must be its leader, duty-bound to guide its activities and to preside—either personally or through a delegate—over its deliberations. This stipulation, implying as it does the idea that in a state subject to the authority of a Divine Law there can be no radical separation of the legislative and the executive phases of government, constitutes a most important, specifically Islamic contribution to political theory."

From Qur'an and *Hadith* he proves that the leader is obliged "to follow the decisions of the majority of his council", yet he is in a presidential system the only holder of authority which enables him to have non-Muslims in his cabinet. There will, thus, be no "unfair

discrimination against non-Muslim citizens" (pp. 55-63). In cases of dispute between Executive and Legislature the matter should go to "a kind of supreme tribunal concerned with constitutional issues." (p. 66)

On the problem of *jihad*, the author insists on its purely defensive character, since Islam forbids a war of aggression, supported by Qur'anic verses. Since war is only permissible in self-defence, the non-Muslim citizen shares with the Muslims the duty to take up arms in defence of the Islamic state. Yet, they are entitled to exemption on grounds of conscience, in which case they pay *jizya*. This is a significant reversal of the orthodox position.

He pleads for free and compulsory education for all citizens, regardless of religion; without knowledge the community cannot watch over the actions of the government (p. 87). Here the principle of equality is applied. But does he envisage a uniform national education for all or an education in Islam for Muslims and another education for non-Muslims?

His ideas about adequate material conditions for all citizens, supported by Qur'anic quotations, are not much different from those which form the basis of the modern welfare state. He derives a social insurance scheme from the time of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. It has nothing to do with the twentieth century; the Muslims' example is the caliph 'Umar and it is, therefore, their duty to complete the work then commenced but neglected in subsequent Islamic history.

He maintains that Islam "is a complete, self-contained ideology which regards all aspects of our existence—moral and physical, spiritual and intellectual, personal and communal—as parts of the indivisible whole which we call 'human life' ", hence "its adherents cannot live a truly Islamic life merely by holding Islamic beliefs... the socio-economic laws of Islam" must be enforced (pp. 95 ff.). It is, of course, true that no human group can preserve its identity merely by the profession of a universal ideal; it must try to realise it in a disciplined way of life. But where one cannot agree with the author is in his claim that only Islam is so all-comprehensive. Other religions, and even the secularised West derives much of its ethic from them, teach the same comprehensive social ideal and try to infuse it into their legislation in a lay state. He is right when he views with scepticism the imitateness of many Muslims where "the West" is concerned, and when he is similarly critical of the opposition of conservative circles to everything Western. For they confuse the real values of Islam with the social conventions of Muslim society and take refuge in historical precedents.

But is he also right when he charges the West with opposition to an Islamic state? That Islam was misrepresented in the West is true and does not only little credit to past Western scholarship and statesmanship, but is a blot on their honour and integrity. Yet Muhammad Asad can hardly be unaware that, certainly in our Western understanding and appreciation of the institutions of Islam has made great strides, not least in co-operation with Muslim scholars. There is a danger in making Western historical memories, going back to the Crusades, responsible for alleged present-day suspicion of and hostility towards a misunderstood Islam—culturally and politically. Our own more recent historical and present memories may also militate against a just and fair assessment of Western attitudes and practices of today. His statement:

“By insisting that the political forms and procedures of a contemporary Islamic state must strictly follow the pattern evolved in the early period of Islam (an insistence for which there is not the slightest warrant in Qur’an or Sunnah), these self-appointed “guardians” of Muhammad’s Message make it impossible for many educated Muslims to accept the *shari’ah* as a practical proposition for the political exigencies of our time”

seems a trifle imaginative. This is not the place to enter into an argument with the author; but it must be said that the Western outsider (who has in any case no business to pronounce on what Muslims ought or ought not to do in their own house) may perhaps be excused if he pays more heed to the statements of traditionalist orthodox religious leaders than to thinkers like Muhammad Asad who set their face against historical precedent, deny the validity of any legal injunction outside the *nusus* and want to re-activate and apply in a twentieth-century setting the primary sources of *Fiqh*, that is, Qur’an and Sunnah only, in disregard of the decisions of many generations of Muslim jurists.

His sense of moral obligation and responsibility is clearly expressed in his comment on Surah III, 110: “You are the best community that has been sent forth to mankind [in that] you enjoin right and forbid wrong and have faith in God”: “Our being a righteous community depends ... on our being prepared to struggle, always and under all circumstances, for the upholding of justice and for the abolition of injustice for *all* people: and this should preclude the possibility of a truly Islamic community ever being unjust to the non-

Muslims living in its midst" (pp. 98f). His answer to the "conservatives" is "that the Law of Islam is not merely a subject for hair-splitting books of *fiqh* and wordy Friday sermons, but is a living, dynamic program sovereign in itself, entirely independent of any particular environment, and therefore practicable at all times and under all conditions: a program, in brief, that would not only not hamper our society's development but would, on the contrary, make it the most progressive, the most self-reliant, and the most vigorous of all existing societies" (pp. 99 f.).

He advocates "a concise, clearly comprehensible code of *shari'ah* laws", without their elaboration by "conventional *fiqh*". Declaring against the various *fiqhi* systems in existence, he wants "a code of the *shari'ah* which (a) would be generally acceptable to all its Muslim citizens without distinction of the *fiqhi* schools to which Muslim citizens belong, and (b) would bring out the eternal, unchangeable quality of the Divine Law in such a way as to demonstrate its applicability to all times and all stages of man's social and intellectual development" (p. 101). He is against harmonisation of existing *fiqh* no less than against a revision in the light of modern conditions which would become obsolete sooner or later, to be revised again until nothing of the Law of Islam would be left. This would negate the very concept of a Divine Law. His remedy is to separate "God's true *shari'ah* from all man-made, deductive *fiqhi* laws".

The codification of the *nusus* is comparatively easy for "a small panel of scholars representing the various schools of *fiqh*, fully conversant with the methodology and history of the Qur'an and the science of *hadith*", elected by the "*majlis ash-shura*". He advocates "historical and technical criticism" of traditions in order to establish their authenticity. As is well known, traditional criticism of the traditions only concerns the *isnad*, chain of traditionists, which must be unbroken, reliable and go back to the Prophet himself or to one of his companions. What has been selected should be submitted to "competent scholars throughout the Muslim world" for their comments and criticisms to be "considered on their merits and utilised in the final revision of the collection, whereupon this 'minimum' code of *shari'ah* ordinances shall be submitted to the *majlis ash-shura* for adoption as the Basic Law of the land" (pp. 104 f.). This collection only consists of self-evident texts of command or prohibition. He does not mention the *nusus* about women, *riba* and *hudud*.

Muhammad Asad is frank in his admission that dissension and confusion exist among Muslims as to what constitutes the socio-political

teaching of Islam on which they ought to model their Islamic state, and he sees in his proposal for a codification of *shar'i* ordinances the only way out of the impasse at the eleventh hour. Whether his plan is feasible will depend on the support it will find among like-minded fervent believers in the greatness of original Islam, and on the chances of its realisation in an age of doubt, unconcern and unbelief. To assess with even some accuracy how widespread this unpropitious state of affairs is, a Western student of Islam and the present scene in Muslim countries must live among Muslims for a considerable time. From my visits, especially to Pakistan, I hesitate to judge; it is well-nigh impossible to put oneself into another person's mind, especially where such personal questions as faith and spirituality are concerned. In circles of devout believers, one often encounters a withdrawal from public witness to the social relevance of Islam in the existing political, economic and social situation. To work out statistically the chances of the advocates of an Islamic state of the types we have described so far, or of Islam as a personal faith and example, as advocated by 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq, Khalid Muhammad Khalid and others is as futile as it would be misleading: spiritual concerns cannot be evaluated by numbers. For it is the strength and tenacity of convictions held which, in the end, count for more, provided the atmosphere exists for their realisation.

(in: *Islam in the Modern National State*. By Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, Cambridge 1965, pp. 125-136.)

ISHTIAQ AHMAD

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE STATE

Muhammad Asad begins his book by posing questions about whether Islam under all circumstances requires that Muslims should strive to create an Islamic state or whether, like other religions, it is opposed to the mixing of religion and politics.¹ To these questions he answers in the affirmative: Islam does require the realization of the supreme purpose of all creation—to establish divine will on earth—dependent in an essential sense on the existence of an Islamic state. Only when eternal immutable standards of 'right' and 'wrong' exist can mankind fulfil its duty of worshipping God truly by submitting to His will. The Islamic state is intrinsic to the purpose of creating a society based on complete submission to the will of God.² The realization of this purpose requires that submission to the will of God is not confined to general rules but to the code of life embodied in the Quran and *Sunna*.³ Man is of course given free will, but if he wishes to lead a proper Islamic life, this can be done only through a participation in social life based on the Islamic pattern.⁴ From this he concludes: "This responsibility can be discharged only by a coordinating agency invested with the powers of command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*): that is, the state. It follows therefore, that the organization of an Islamic state or states is an indispensable condition of Islamic life in the true sense of the word."⁵

He rejects the idea of a secular state since such a state does not submit to a universal morality but to the interests of a nation, class, or race, or some other divisive category. Only religion can provide a

¹ Muhammad Asad: *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

universal code of morality. This function is fulfilled admirably by Islam, which is a religion meant for the good of all mankind.¹

Purpose of the Creation of Pakistan

Asad does not discuss the historical background of Pakistan but assumes that the vast majority of the people wanted to create an Islamic state based on the Quran and *Sunnah*.²

The Political Structure

Asad repeats the standard dogma that sovereignty in an Islamic state belongs to God. However, the Muslim community exercises vicarious sovereignty. This means that while the Islamic state owes its existence to the will of the people (who voluntarily create the Islamic state), it derives its sovereignty from God, and not the people.³

Ijtihād

While repeating typical conventional beliefs about the *Sharia* being a complete code of life, he argues forcefully for greater scope for free legislation. He asserts that the actual *Sharia* includes a small number of laws based on the Quran and *Sunna*. The rest are laws resulting from the *ijtihad* of every age. Such laws based on the independent reasoning of earlier Muslim scholars have no sacrosanct value and can therefore be changed and replaced. Every generation has the right to exercise *ijtihad* in the temporal areas.⁴ He quotes a Quranic verse to substantiate his assertion: 'For every one of you We have ordained a Divine Law and an open road', Quran ch. 5:48.⁵ He puts his standpoint on the need for fresh *ijtihad* in the following words:

"A rediscovery of the 'open road' of Islam is urgently required at a time like this, when the Muslim world finds itself in the throes of a cultural crisis which we may affirm or deny ... Set as we are in the midst of a rapidly changing world, our society, too,

¹ Ibid., pp. 4-10.

² Ibid., p. ix.

³ Ibid., pp. 38-9.

⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

is subject to the same inexorable law of change ... From the Islamic point of view, an endeavour to return to the realities of Quran and Sunnah, and to find on their basis new channels for our political thought and our social actions, is a movement of the first-named kind. The present drift of Muslim society towards Western concepts and institutions is a movement of the second kind.”¹

Therefore, asserts Asad, it is necessary to give up reliance on the ‘final’ verdicts of the past scholars, and to begin thinking afresh on the basis of a study of the original message in the Quran and *Sunna*.² In order to work out a new programme based on free inquiry:

“First, the concept of Islamic law—especially with regard to public law—requires once again that simplicity which had been envisaged for it by the Law-Giver but has subsequently been buried under many layers of conventional and frequently arbitrary interpretation. Second—and this is most pertinent to the problem before us—the outward forms and functions of an Islamic state need not necessarily correspond to any ‘historical precedent’.”³

Form of Government

The Quran and *Sunna* do not prescribe any particular form of government, nor elaborate a constitutional theory, however: ‘The political law emerging from the context of Quran and Sunnah, is nevertheless, not an illusion. It is very vivid and concrete inasmuch as it gives us a clear outline of a political scheme capable of realization at all times and under all conditions of human life.’⁴ Further, there is no specific form of the Islamic state, but many, and it is up to the Muslims of every age to find one that suits them.⁵ However, the principle of consultation is to be observed under all circumstances. The Quran states this explicitly: Their [the Believers] communal business [*amr*] is to be

¹ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

[transacted in] consultation among themselves', Quran ch. 42: 38.¹

The essential principles which all Islamic governments have to observe are:

1. The government should strive to create unity and brotherhood among Muslims based on common ideological consciousness.
2. The *Sharia* should be the supreme law of the land.
3. Government should be conducted through consultation. Dictatorship is contrary to Islam.
4. The economic and social conditions should be such that people feel safe and protected.
5. No law repugnant to the Quran and *Sunna* should be enacted.
6. The government should be elected on the basis of the widest Muslim suffrage including both men and women.
7. An elected assembly should be empowered to legislate on temporal matters.
8. Soliciting public office should be prohibited by law. A person canvassing for himself for either an administrative job or membership in the representative assembly should be disqualified. The community should nominate candidates.
9. Difference of opinion should be allowed in the assembly since this stimulates reflection. The Prophet said: "The difference of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of] God's grace."² Even the validity of the majority principle is to be found in the hadiths of the Prophet: 'Follow the largest group.'³; 'It is your duty to stand by the united community and the majority.'⁴
10. Since Islam allows difference of opinion the right to form political parties should also be recognized.⁵

Asad believes that the presidential form of government is best suited for an Islamic state, as it corresponds to the Islamic concept of caliph. A strong head of the state possessing necessary qualifications to lead the community should be entrusted with the job. His ministers should hold office during his pleasure.⁶ A supreme judicial tribunal

¹ Ibid., p. 44

² Ibid., p. 48.

³ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶ Ibid.

should be the guardian of the constitution. It should see to it that no act of the executive, or the legislature, violates any *nass* (explicit) injunction of the Quran and *Sunna*.¹

Citizens

An Islamic state is based on toleration but it distinguishes its citizens on the basis of ideology. Any notion of territorial nationhood is alien to Islam. It recognizes nationhood only on the basis of ideology. He observes:

“One must ... frankly admit from the outset that without a certain amount of differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims there can be no question of our ever having an Islamic state or states in the sense envisaged in Quran and Sunnah. Consequently, any prevarication on this subject is utterly dishonest with regard to both the non-Muslim world around us and the Muslim community itself.”²

However, non-Muslims can seek employment in state services. They may even be taken into the armed forces, in which case they are exempted from the *jizya*.³

Rights and Duties of Citizens

Beginning with the duties, Asad mentions obedience to state authority as long as it is based on the ordinances of the Quran. No obedience is due to a sinful and oppressive ruler.⁴ However, the right of rebellion can only be exercised in the extreme case of the government falling into the hands of persons who behave like infidels. Normally, an unobservant ruler should be forced into mending his ways through peaceful pressure.⁵ However, if a government launches a war of aggression under the pretext that it is *jihad*, a Muslim can refuse to fight. *Jihad* is meant strictly for defensive purposes. Even non-Muslim citizens

¹ Ibid., pp. 65-7.

² Ibid., p. 40.

³ Ibid., pp. 74-5.

⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 77-81.

may be allowed to participate in the just self-defence of an Islamic state.¹

The rights due to the citizens are the following:

1. *Freedom of Opinion:* The citizens have the full right to criticize the government and to propose alternative lines of action. However, the state cannot permit criticism of the *Sharia*, preaching rebellion against the state and the spread of indecent ideas.
2. *Protection of Life and Property:* Without due course of law the property and life of citizens, cannot be interfered with by the state. He quotes a verse from the Quran to support his position: 'O you who believe! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and saluted the inmates', Quran ch. 24: 27.²
3. *Free and Compulsory Education:* All citizens, men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, should have the right to free and compulsory education.³

Revitalization of True Islam

Commenting on the obstacles in the way of Muslims with regard to their desire to create a genuine Islamic polity, Asad blames both Western distortion of Islam which has negatively affected the new generation of Muslims and the *ulama*. About the pernicious role of the *ulama* he remarks:

"By insisting that the political forms and procedures of a contemporary Islamic state must strictly follow the pattern evolved in the early period of Islam (an insistence for which there is not the slightest warrant in Quran and Sunnah), these self-appointed 'guardians' of Muhammad's Message make it impossible for many educated Muslims to accept the *shari'ah* as a practical proposition for the political exigencies of our times. By representing the idea of *jihad*, in clear contradiction to all Quranic injunctions, as instrument of aggressive expansion of Muslim rule over non-Muslim territories, they sow fear in the hearts of non-Muslims and fill many righteous Muslims with disgust at the thought of the injustice which such a tendency so

¹ Ibid., pp. 70-4.

² Ibid., p. 85.

³ Ibid., pp. 86-7.

obviously implies. And, finally, by claiming (again, without any warrant in Quran and Sunnah) that the *shari'ah* imposes on us the duty to discriminate, in all social aspects of life, between the Muslims and non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state to the detriment of the non-Muslim minorities, they make it impossible for the minorities to bear with equanimity the thought that the country in which they live might become an Islamic state.¹

For changing this situation Asad prescribes two basic measures:

1. The position that all traditional *fiqh* laws apply to a modern Islamic polity should be dismissed since this makes any fresh legislation difficult and unity among the various sects becomes impossible.
2. A new code of *Sharia* laws should be framed which is applicable for all times. These should be the few laws based on the unequivocal texts of the Quran and the authentic sayings of the Prophet, which are not subject to controversy among any section of Muslims. The existing *Fiqh* laws may be adapted by fresh *ijtihad* but these have no validity *per se*. This separation of the laws based on direct revelation or Prophetic wisdom, from the vast codes of laws based on deductive reasoning of *Fiqh* experts, is the only way: 'for the Muslims to regain a genuine understanding of Islam's ideology, to overcome their cultural stagnation and decay, to shed pernicious automatism now so prevalent in religious thought, and to make the *shari'ah* a living proposition for and in an Islamic state'.²

The Economic System

Asad depicts his Islamic state as a welfare state whose inspiring principles originated more than thirteen hundred years ago. He points to the golden period of Umar which presages the modern welfare state by many centuries.³ He remarks:

"It follows, therefore, that a state, in order to be truly Islamic, must arrange the affairs of the community in such a way that

¹ Ibid., pp. 98-9.

² Ibid., pp. 102-3.

³ Ibid., p. 92.

every individual, man and woman, shall enjoy that minimum of material well-being without which there can be no human dignity, no real freedom and, in the last resort, no spiritual progress."¹

The *zakāt* tax is interpreted as an egalitarian measure meant to facilitate redistribution of wealth. The Islamic state can legitimately impose additional taxes for managing its welfare policies.²

The Social Milieu

Asad firmly opposes traditional Islamic assumptions about the validity and applicability of *Fiqh* laws, and thus opposes much of traditional society which evolved under their influence. Although he does not touch the question of women separately he favours their right to vote and to get education. Free inquiry finds acceptance, and he lays considerable emphasis on education for all citizens of the state irrespective of the religious factor.³

Analysis

Muhammad Asad attempts a harmonization between the idea of an Islamic state based on the sovereignty of Allah, and the democratic right of the community to legislate freely in vast unoccupied areas. The consensus of the past which is not related to the few laws emanating from the clear-worded injunctions of the Quran and *Sunna*, is not binding. Thus the area reserved for immutable divine ordinances is reduced and that for independent law-making expands. He lays stress on basing the state on the eternal message of the Quran and *Sunna*, which implies emphasis on broad principles. This stands in contrast to the position of the *ulama*, including Maududi, who insist upon the observance of extensive laws contained in the *Sharia*.

However, Asad insists on maintaining ideological purity and justifies the state distinguishing between its Muslim citizens and the non-Muslims. The imposition of *jizya* is implied unless able-bodied non-Muslims join the defence services. While only the post of the head of the state is to be reserved for a Muslim, it is not clear what role non-Muslims can play in the political life of the polity. He talks of broad

¹ Ibid., p. 88.

² Ibid., p. 91.

³ Ibid., pp. 86-7.

Muslim suffrage and the elective nature of the chief executive and the legislature. There is no mention of universal adult franchise, which might also include non-Muslims as active participants in the political process. It seems he is striving for minimizing discrimination of the religious minorities which the *ulama* want to extend to all aspects of societal life. However, this he does by justifying the need to exclude non-Muslims from the implementation of Islamic ideology. This could mean practically all policy-making areas.

Asad takes issue with the dogmatism and sectarianism of the *ulama* and wants to summon a new assembly which is to codify the actual (those based on clear instructions in Quran and *Sunna*) divine laws. Obviously this means a reliance on modern-educated Muslims, since the established experts—the *ulama*—could not be expected to support such a drastic break with the traditional system. Obviously the *ulama* could not be expected to acquiesce in the demise of their own position as experts. On the other hand, the authority of such an assembly to interfere with the 'clear-worded laws' in the Quran and *Sunna*, which include the harsh criminal code, is denied by Asad.

This concession to the traditional position puts a brake on the process of democratization which he seems to support. How alleged criminals are treated by society is a social question to which legal effect is given. In the present evolution of ethical values, maiming and incapacitating punishments do not appeal so readily to modern sensibilities. This applies to the Muslim world too. Except for Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Iran and of late Pakistan, the Quranic criminal code is not observed as standard law in many parts of the Muslim world. Obviously in a genuine Islamic state raised on Asad's ideals this deviation would be rectified.

The position on other democratic measures is equally compromised by his tendency to plead for modernization and democratization and also to remain in line with doctrine. Thus, while political parties may exist and oppose one another on policies, they are not to compete for office. Any intention to seek office is to be prohibited.

The chief argument put forward by Asad in favour of an Islamic as opposed to the secular state is that only a universal religion like Islam can lay the basis for a fair interaction between different nations and people. Man-made standards are biased and temporary. On the other hand, Islam with its glorious traditions of racial heterogeneity, tolerant treatment of minorities, strict standards of justice and the emphasis on

pious government, can provide peace and harmony to the world. These values, which Asad has in mind, obviously refer to an idealized Islam, because his whole critical tirade is about sectarianism, discrimination against non-Muslims, and aggressive holy war preached by the *ulama*. On the other hand, he includes in his own scheme the possibility of able-bodied non-Muslims paying the *jizya*. This seems odd since he is apparently opposed to the traditional conception of the Islamic state being potentially at war with the non-Muslim world. By referring to the possibility of *jizya*, Asad concedes the validity of the belief about the theoretical continuity of armed conflict between the world of Islam and the non-Muslim forces of falsehood and evil.

In practical terms it means that Asad aspires, on the one hand, to bring about the rebirth of ideal Islam (which is possible only as a result of a successful struggle against established Islam), and, on the other, the acceptance of such an Islam by the world community, not through *jihad*, but through the weight of its moral superiority. In this project Asad is caught up in a difficult situation. Without the power and influence of the *ulama* being curbed effectively, ideal Islam is difficult to establish within the Muslim community. On the other hand, unless some of the clear-worded laws of punishment in the Quran and *Sunna* and ideas about *jizya* are replaced by legislation based on modern humanist values, the chances of converting the non-Muslim world through good example seem unlikely.

On economic and social matters Asad relies less on dogmatic support. The emphasis is on a welfare state actively involved in creating material well-being through education and egalitarian reforms. While property cannot be taken over by the state without due course of law, it can be taxed heavily in the interest of welfare. Thus private property is legitimate but not sacrosanct as the absolutists and Maududi assert.

(in: *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan*. By Ishtiaq Ahmad. London: Frances Pinter 1987, pp. 121-128).

PIPIP AHMAD RIFAI HASAN

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF MUHAMMAD ASAD

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the political thought of a prominent Pakistani scholar Muhammad Asad (1900-1992). His political views were originally published in March 1948 in the form of an essay entitled *Islamic Constitution-Making*. This essay was a response and contribution to the issue of the Islamic character of Pakistan.¹ Thus, he formulated his theory in the concrete political situation of a struggling state whose *raison d'être* was Islam and the desire of the majority of Indian Muslims to have their own state where they could live as Muslims. Later in 1961, the University of California Press published Asad's *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* which represents a development of the ideas first set forth in the essay.² In addition, his political views could be found in his book *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*.³

The significance of this study lies in its discussion of several crucial topics such as, firstly, the nature and scope of Islamic political thought. Political thought, according to Hamid Enayat, has been at the forefront of Muslim intellectual life over the last two centuries. Two reasons are given to explain this phenomenon. The first is the ongoing struggle of various Muslim peoples during this period for their domestic freedom and independence from Western powers. This struggle has not yet reached its avowed goals, thus, ensuring the continual politicization of the Muslim mind in the future. The second is the conjunction of

¹ See Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; reprint 1993), ix.

² Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1961).

³ See *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1987), 71-87.

substantial economic, strategic and political interests on the part of the outside world in the heartland of the "abode of Islam", resulting in the Western obsession with the "energy-crisis".¹

Nevertheless, these explanations do not adequately explain the primacy of politics in modern Islam, since they do not take cognizance of a more fundamental issue, namely, the inherent link between Islam as a comprehensive scheme for all aspects of human life, and politics as an indispensable instrument for securing the universal compliance with that scheme. This issue has been discussed by numerous scholars who have offered both doctrinal and historical reasons for the inseparability of Islam and politics.² In his political study of Pakistan, Keith Callard, observed that to a Muslim, Islam embraces both religion and politics. It is, according to Callard, an outlook upon life that embraces social, political and distribution of wealth, in the maintenance of social services, in international relations, in the structure of family life, in public finance and the proper position of the hands during prayer.³

In addition, Islam is never content with the mere exposition of its ideals, but constantly seeks the means to implement them. It is also a religion that stresses above all the collective enforcement of public morals, and is indeed very much a social religion that seeks to organize the practices of social and family life. Therefore, according to the Muslim point of view, both the government and the state, constitute the proper instruments for the implementation of Islamic social values and ideals. At this point it is important to note that the government's importance does not lie in the "political" aspect of its mission (i.e., the representation of interests, the working of institutions, etc.) but in the

¹ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin (Austin: University of Texas, 1982; 3rd paperback printing, 1991), 1.

² Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 1; See also Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists*, London Oriental Series vol. 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1; A. K. S. Lambton, "Islamic Political Thought," in Joseph Schacht and C. E. Bosworth, eds., *The Legacy of Islam*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 404; Cf John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 3rd ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 28-29; Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. and ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 18-23 and 66-67.

³ Keith Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. 1957, 2nd impression 1958), 193-197.

crucial social role expected from it as guardian of the moral code, that is expected to constantly watch, give direction to, and actually mould the social fabric.¹ Moreover, the state is to be the organization to which the Muslim *Ummah* would entrust the task of executing its will.² On this issue, W. M. Watt states that due to this emphasis on communal solidarity as well as the circumstances of the early community—the wielding of political power by the Prophet Muhammad—there has never been in Islam any demarcation comparable to that in Christianity between “the church” and “the world”. The normal community, according to him, has always a solidly Muslim community.³

Secondly, the study of Asad’s thought also demonstrates two historical realities which challenge the universality of the inseparability of religion and politics in Islam. The first is that different groups of Muslims interpret the Qur’anic injunctions and the Prophetic sayings differently depending on their backgrounds, and the realities of their milieu. The second is that the majority of Muslims, for the greater part of their history have lived under regimes which had only the most tenuous link with those norms, and observed the *Shari’ah* only to the extent that it legitimized their power in the eyes of the faithful.⁴

Thirdly, the study of Asad’s political thought highlights three distinctive features which differentiate it with the Islamic political thought of the medieval period. The first is that his political thought emerged in a favourable environment, and in a milieu that enjoyed the freedom of speech, assembly and action. Asad began expressing his ideas following the Indian independence movement and amidst the establishment of the state of Pakistan: an atmosphere greatly conducive to the formulation and expression of political ideas. Needless to say, most of the Islamic political thought of the medieval period was formulated under regimes denying those essential freedoms. The second is that Asad formulated his political views in isolation from related

¹ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991; paperback, 1993), 35; Fazlur Rahman, “Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu.” *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 1967): 205.

² Rahman, “Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu,” 205.

³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought: The Basic Concepts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968; paperback ed., 1987), 29; cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Pakistan as an Islamic State: Preliminary Draft* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), 22-25.

⁴ Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 1.

disciplines. In other words, they are independent on, and not part of, jurisprudence and theology. Thirdly, he expressed his political ideas in the language of the Islamic sciences—using stereotyped legal phrases, citing Qur'anic verses and Prophetic sayings, picking up some Western political institutions and ideas, and occasionally naming them in terms familiar to or within Islamic nomenclature.¹

Fourthly, Asad's political thought proposes a contemporary model of the *Shari'ah* state. For him, Islam should serve as a guide and inspiring ideal as well as the constitution of the state whose law is to be the *Shari'ah*. He is committed to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as the sole sources of the law although allowing room for contemporary human discretion in the interpretation and application of the Scriptures. Consequently, it is interesting to take cognizance of Asad's position on key public law such as the status of non-Muslims and women, and the question of the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim state—issues which are crucial to every Muslim political thinker in the contemporary world.²

On the basis of the afore-mentioned views, we find that central to Asad's political thought is that a state can become truly Islamic only by virtue of a conscious application of the socio-political terms of Islam to the life of the nation, and by an incorporation of those tenets in the basic constitution of the country. The purpose of an Islamic state is not self-determination for a racial or cultural entity but the establishment of Islamic law as a practical proposition in human affairs. This is a clear rejection of the modern national state with its separation of religion and politics.

Asad is a Muslim thinker who tries to formulate his political ideas in conformity with credal, epistemological and methodological premises that ensure the continuity of Islamic thought. And, although he maintained that the Qur'an and *Sunnah* do not lay down any specific form of state and that the *Shari'ah* does not offer a detailed constitutional theory, Asad held that any form of the Islamic state must be in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal *Shari'ah* consists of either general principles, within which detailed rules can be introduced through *ijtihad*, or details in matters not effected by changes caused by

¹ Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 2-3.

² Erwin I. J. Rosenthal. *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), xiii; Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 37-38.

human social development. He also envisaged room for *ijtihad* in matters not covered by the *Shari'ah*. The *Shari'ah* is formed only by what the Qur'an and *Sunnah* have commanded, excluding *fiqh*, the traditional Islamic law. Indeed, he spoke of the supremacy of the *Shari'ah* and the authority of the *ummah* to interpret and preserve it thus ensuring the continuity and development of Islamic thought.

Following this argument, he criticized the idea prevailing among many Muslims, both in the past and the present, that there could be but one form of state deserving the adjective "Islamic"—namely, the form manifested under the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. For Asad, there can be many forms for the Islamic state so long as they are in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal ordinances of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. In other words, he does not rely on historical precedents as possible guides for his model of an Islamic state.

Asad is a distinguished Islamic scholar, mainly because of his faith, intellectual commitment, honesty and open-mindedness. He is also a dynamic person, an excellent thinker, and one of the most outstanding journalists who not only tried to get and send news but also tried to learn from, and befriend all those people he encountered. Moreover, he is a committed Muslim who not only thinks and writes books, but also puts his faith and ideas into practice and action. Hence, he was actively involved, among others, in the effort to create Pakistan—the first state in contemporary history to be established solely for the sake of Islam.

Nevertheless, for many people, Muslims and non-Muslims, he is virtually an unknown person. Consequently, with this study of his political thought, the present writer tries to place and introduce Asad first, as a Muslim who has well aware that no political idea, however valid and vital for the freedom and prosperity of Muslims, can mobilize them in a successful effort to cure their ills, unless it is shown to conform in both form and substance to the dictates of their religious consciousness. Second, Asad was a forceful proponent of modern Islamic legislation. While he believed that the comprehension and interpretation of Islamic law is dependent on the individual's knowledge and conscience alone, he at the same time believed that in matters affecting the collective good *ijtihad* to be based on collective *ijmā'*. This collective or corporate *ijmā'* is to be carried out by a legislative assembly (*majlis al-shūra*) which must be truly representative of the entire community. Third, Asad is a Muslim political thinker who shows strong concern with constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers

of the various organs of the state.¹ Thus, he deals with issues such as government by consent and council and the relationship between the executive and the legislative and between citizens and government.² This concern is no doubt encouraging because it indicates a commitment to constitutionalism.

In describing and interpreting the political thought of Muhammad Asad, this study will limit itself to his ideas, and will only delve into contemporary historical affairs or ideas, when such affairs or ideas shed light on his thought. Thus, this thesis will start with a brief biography of Asad as well as an introduction to his works in order to illustrate the background to his political thought. This is followed by a summary of the traditional Islamic political heritage in the classical and medieval periods of Islam. This summary is proffered in order to demonstrate the influence that this political heritage exerts on modern political thought. It will start with the concepts of the Islamic state and nationalism, the development of Muslim nationalism in India and the creation of Pakistan. This is followed by a discussion of Asad's views on state and government in Islam, the relationship between Islam and the state, the purpose behind the creation of Pakistan, the structure and organization of state, and the latter's economic system. It also analyses other issues which were conceived to be the most important ones in contemporary Islamic political thought, namely the supremacy of the *Shari'ah* the position of non-Muslims and women, the relationship with non-Muslim states, the control of power, and modern Islamic legislation. We also describe the views of other Muslim thinkers in order to achieve a comparative perspective on these views, particularly the application of the *shari'ah* in the Muslim world especially in Pakistan.

This thesis is an historical study, in the sense that it tries to offer a history of certain religio-political ideas. Moreover, since historical studies usually rely on written sources, this study will completely rely on the latter kind of sources. The primary source used in this thesis is from

¹ The emergence of constitutionalism in the Islamic policy began in the Ottoman-Turkish Constitution of 1876, and serious confrontations between constitutionalism and Islam occurred in Iran 1906. See Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 132-250; Said Amir Arjomand, "Religion and Constitutionalism in Western History and in Modern Iran and Pakistan." in Said Amir Arjomand. ed. *The Political Dimensions of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 69-99.

² See chapter 4 of this thesis.

Asad's *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*. The present writer also consulted a number of Asad's other books, namely *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* which contains several articles such as: "Islamic Civilization and Islamic Law," "What Do We Mean by Pakistan?", "The Encounter of Islam and the West," "A Vision of Jerusalem," "Islam and the Spirit of Present Times," etc.: *Islam at the Crossroads; Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam* (A Translation and Explanation of the *Kitab al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Bukhari*); *The Road to Mecca*, and *The Message of the Qur'an* (A Translation and Explanation of the Qur'an), in addition to two Asad's articles namely, "Towards a Resurrection of Thought" which was published in *Islamic Culture*, "The Tribe that Kept its Names," published in *Arabia* magazine, and two interviews that were also in *Arabia* namely, "Muhammad Asad—doyen of Islamic scholars" and "Asad Interviewed," as well as an article by Hasan Zillur Rahim published in the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and entitled i.e. "Muhammad Asad: Visionary Islamic Scholar." Alas, the present writer was unable to obtain two of Asad's books, namely *Home-Coming of the Heart* and *Meditations*, which are as yet unavailable in North America. The writer had sent letters to several Islamic book stores and publishers in Europe but it was to no avail since these two books had apparently been sold out!

Lastly, the present author had the opportunity to consult a number of analytical and scholarly works on Asad's political thought. We consulted Erwin I. J. Rosenthal's discussion of Asad in chapter 6 of his book *Islam in the Modern National State*, Ishtiaq Ahmed's analysis in chapter 6 of his book *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan*, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im's discussion of reform methodology, *shari'ah* and modern constitutionalism in chapters 3 and 4 of his book *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law*, and Ahmad Syafii Maarif's discussion of Islam and the basis of the State in Indonesia in chapter 4 of his dissertation "Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia." Hamid Enayat's *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Farid Esack's *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, and Mehran Tamadonfar's *The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership: Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Pragmatism* which slightly discuss Asad's political views were also consulted. The full bibliographical details will be given at the end of this work. In writing this thesis the present writer used Kate L. Turabians *A Manual for Writers*

of *Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 5th ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) as a guide.

CHAPTER I

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MUHAMMAD ASAD AND HIS WORKS

Muhammad Asad, writer, adventurer, diplomat, Muslim thinker par excellence, translator of the Qur'an, and author of one of the most remarkable spiritual autobiographies ever, *The Road to Mecca*, is not as well recognized, even among Muslims, as he ought to be. This is unfortunate. Asad died in Spain in 1992, and he remains virtually unknown in the West and an enigma to the average Muslim. Those who have followed his career through his books and writings, however, know that no one has contributed more in our times to the understanding of Islam and the awakening of Muslims, or worked harder to build a bridge between the East and the West, than Muhammad Asad.¹

Asad was born as Leopold Weiss on July 2, 1900 in Lwów, Galicia, now in Poland, and then part of the Austrian empire as the second of three children. He came from a Jewish family of Poland-Austria. His father was a barrister who had dreamed of devoting himself to science. Asad's grandfather had been an orthodox rabbi in Czernowitz, capital of the then Austrian province of Bukovina. In accordance with his family's tradition, Asad received, through private tutors at home, a thorough grounding in the Hebrew religious lore and the sacred scriptures. Thus, by the age of thirteen, he not only could read Hebrew with great fluency but also spoke it freely and had, in addition, a fair acquaintance with Aramaic. He studied the Hebrew Bible in the original; and the *Mishna* and *Gemara* became familiar to him. He could discuss with a good deal of self assurance the differences between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds; and he immersed himself in the intricacies of Biblical exegesis, called *Targum*, just as he had been destined for a rabbinical career.²

Asad ran away from home at 14 and joined the Austrian army to

¹ Hasan Zillur Rahim, "Muhammad Asad: Visionary Islamic Scholar. *Report on Middle East Affairs*, September 1995. vol. 14, no. 3. 45.

² Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Makkah* (Lahore: Maktaba Jawahar ul Uloom n.d.), 51-55.

fight in the First World War. For about two years after the end of the Great War he studied, in a somewhat desultory fashion, the history of art and philosophy at the University of Vienna. But his heart was not in those studies. A quiet academic career did not attract him. He felt a yearning to come into more intimate grips with life, to enter it without any of those carefully contrived, artificial defences which security-minded people love to build around themselves. He wanted to find for himself an approach to the spiritual order of things which, he knew, must exist but which he could not yet discern. By 1922 he had become a foreign correspondent in the Near and Far East for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, then one of the most outstanding newspapers in Europe.¹ His career in journalism took him to Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran (Persia), Jordan, Arabia, and Afghanistan, and gave him a unique perspective on world affairs, particularly issues relating to Jews and Arabs.²

While staying with his uncle in Jerusalem, he came into contact with *Committee of Action* and was repelled by its contempt toward the Arabs. "Although of Jewish origin myself," wrote Asad in *The Road to Mecca*. "I conceived from the outset a strong objection to Zionism... I considered it immoral that immigrants, assisted by a great foreign power, should come from abroad with the avowed intention of attaining a majority in Palestine and thus to dispossess the people whose country it had been . . . This attitude of mine was beyond the comprehension of practically all the Jews whom I came in contact during those months. They could not understand what I saw in the Arabs... They were not in the least interested in what the Arabs thought; almost none of them took the pains to learn Arabic; and everyone accepted without question the dictum that Palestine was the rightful heritage of the Jews."³

It was there that Asad encountered Chaim Weizmann, the undisputed leader of the Zionist movement, and had a heated discussion with him regarding the Zionist philosophy. "What about the Arabs?" Asad asked Dr. Weizmann who was one day articulating his vision of a

¹ Before his association with the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Asad also had been a journalist in the *United Telegraph* of Berlin in 1921. After his resignation from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* he became a foreign correspondent for three other newspapers: the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of Zürich, the *Telegraaf* of Amsterdam and the *Kölnische Zeitung* of Cologne. Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 65, 96-98, and 307.

² Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 56-57 and 98-99.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 93-94.

Jewish National Home. What about the Arabs?" echoed Dr. Weizmann. "Well, how can you ever hope to make Palestine your homeland in the face of the vehement opposition of the Arabs who, after all, are in the majority in this country?", Asad continued. The Zionist leader shrugged his shoulders and answered dryly: "We expect they won't be in a majority after a few years."¹

Asad was overcome with sorrow as he reflected on this experience. "How was it possible, I wondered, for people endowed with so much creative intelligence as the Jews to think of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms alone?... Were they so hopelessly blind to the painful future which their policy must bring to the struggles and the bitterness to which the Jewish island would forever remain exposed in the midst of a hostile Arab sea? And how strange, I thought, that a nation which had suffered so many wrongs in the discourse of its long and sorrowful Diaspora was now in single-minded pursuit of its own goal, ready to inflict a grievous wrong on another nation. Such a phenomenon, I knew, was not unknown to history, but it made me, nonetheless, very sad to see it enacted before my eyes."²

Traveling extensively throughout the Muslim world, Asad's interest in Islam deepened. At the same time, he began to examine critically the decay he found among Muslims. Arabia was bogged down in tribal warfare; foreign powers were conquering Muslim lands with the help of Muslim puppets. By 1918, the military control of Britain and France in the Middle East and the Maghrib was stronger than ever before. The Ottoman Empire had lost its Arab provinces and was confined to Anatolia and a small part of Europe. In the Hijaz, the Sharif Husayn proclaimed himself king and ruled for a few years, but in 1920 his rule, ineffective and deprived of British support, was ended by an expansion of the power of the Saudi ruler, 'Abd al-'Aziz from central Arabia. Asad observed all these events and wrote a series of articles on them in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Asad also sadly saw that most Muslims were mired in the lowlands of self-righteousness, wallowing in intellectual stagnation by blindly imitating the West. For Asad, the innate character of Western civilization definitely precludes a religious orientation in human beings.³

¹ Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 94.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 96.

³ Asad harshly criticizes Reza Khan, and especially Mustafa Kemal whom, according to him, is a petty masquerader who denies all values to Islam. Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 99-101, 104-105, and 188-190, 243-248, 264-270, 297, and

In 1926, the young Leopold Weiss converted to Islam in Berlin and became Muhammad Asad. A few weeks later his wife, Elsa, an artist (a painter), also converted.¹ When he informed his father that he had become a Muslim, the latter did not even answer his letter. Some months later his sister wrote, telling him that their father considered him dead. Thereupon he sent him another letter, assuring him that his acceptance of Islam did not change anything in his attitude toward him or his love for him. Asad told his father that Islam enjoined upon him (Asad) to love and honor his parents above all other people. But this letter also remained unanswered. Their relationship was resumed in 1935, after Asad's father had at last come to understand and appreciate the reasons for his son's conversion to Islam. Although Asad and his

319: Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads* 101-104; Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 315-319; Muhammad Asad, *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1987; reprint 1993), 75.

¹ Several months before embracing Islam he describes his perceptions and inner condition as follows: "An integrated image of Islam was now emerging with a finality, a decisiveness that sometimes astounded me. It was taking shape by a process that could almost be described as a kind of mental osmosis—that is, without any conscious effort on my part to piece together and 'systematize' the many fragments of knowledge that had come my way during the past four years. I saw before me something like a perfect work of architecture, with all its elements harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, with nothing superfluous and nothing lacking—a balance and composure which gave one the feeling that everything in the outlook and postulates of Islam was 'in its proper place.'" But at the same time he also realized the problems faced by Muslims. He writes: "I had no illusions as to the present state of affairs in the Muslim world. The four years I had spent in those countries had shown me that while Islam was still alive, perceptible in the world-view of its adherents and in their silent admission of its ethical premises, they themselves were like people paralyzed, unable to translate their beliefs into fruitful action. But what concerned me more than the failure of present-day Muslims to implement the scheme of Islam were the potentialities of that scheme itself. It was sufficient for me to know that for a short time, quite at the beginning of Islamic history, a successful attempt had been made to translate that scheme into practice: and what had seemed possible at one time might perhaps become really possible at another. What did it matter, I told myself, that the Muslims had gone astray from the original teaching and subsided into indolence and ignorance? What did matter that they did not live up to the ideal placed before them by the Arabian Prophet thirteen centuries ago—if the ideal itself still lay open to all who were willing to listen to its message?" Asad, *The Road to Meekah*, 301 and 305.

father never met again in person, they remained in continuous correspondence until 1942. After his conversion to Islam he lived for nearly six years in Arabia and enjoyed the friendship of King Ibn Sa'ud. The story of the years before his conversion reflects the spiritual odyssey of a man in search of a home, a man struck by wanderlust, unable to quell his restless spirit until embracing Islam.¹

To understand how Muslims could regenerate themselves, Asad took a characteristic approach: he immersed himself in understanding the source of Islam, the Qur'an. Embarking on an intensive study of classical Arabic, he began at the same time living among the bedouins of Central and Eastern Arabia whose speech and linguistic associations had essentially remained unchanged since the time of the Prophet Muhammad when the Qur'an was being revealed. It gave him insight into the semantics of the Qur'anic language unknown to any Westerner and enabled him later to translate the Qur'an into English as *The Message of the Qur'an*. Along with his commentary, *The Message* is without parallel in conveying the holy book's meaning and spirit to non-Arab readers.²

In his study of the Qur'an, Asad found that Islam gave "Yes to action, No to passivity. Yes to life and No to asceticism." In its pages, he found an intense God-consciousness that made no division between body and soul or faith and reason, but consisted of a harmonious interplay of spiritual needs and social demands. "It was obvious to me that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own failure to live up to it...It was not Muslims that had made Islam great; It was Islam that had made the Muslims great. But as soon as their faith became habit and ceased to be a program of life, to be consciously pursued, the creative impulse that underlay their civilization waned and gradually gave way to indolence, sterility and cultural decay."³

From that point on, Muslim renaissance became Asad's goal in life. He traveled far and wide, conferred with kings, leaders and the common people "between the Libyan desert and the Pamirs, between the Bosphorus and the Arabian sea," and began putting his ideas on paper. *Islam at the Crossroads*, first published in 1934, still stunts the

¹ Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 1, 56-58, 298, and 311; Muhammad Asad. *Islam at the Crossroads* (Lahore: Arafat Publications and Sh. Muhammad Ashraf. 1934; reprint, 1975). 4.

² *The Message of the Qur'an* trans. and expl. Muhammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), iv-v; Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 9-16 and 193.

³ Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 190, 192, and 193.

contemporary reader with its analysts of Muslim regression and its bold prescription for instilling self-assurance to an Islamic world suffering from lack of confidence under the onslaught of Western civilization.¹

But dark clouds had been gathering over the horizon of Europe. It was only in the late 1940s that Asad discovered that his father and sister had died. He did not know that in 1942 they were deported from Vienna by the Nazis and subsequently died in a concentration camp. Since 1932 Asad had been in India where he befriended Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual father of the idea of a separate Muslim state in India. Iqbal persuaded Asad to abandon plans to travel to eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and "to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state."² He became editor of *Islamic Culture*, the Hyderabad Quarterly Review, replacing Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall—who had edited the Quarterly Review since July 1927 and died in 1936—from January 1937 until April 1938. Although there was an announcement and eulogy when Pickthall died, it is strange to find that there was no such announcement in *Islamic Culture* that Asad had replaced him as editor, or, when he stopped to be editor after April 1938.³

During the Second World War, due to his then Austrian citizenship, Asad was interned by the British government in India from September 1, 1939 to August 14, 1945. Throughout those years he was the only Muslim in an internment camp peopled by some three thousand Germans, Austrians and Italians—both Nazis and anti-Nazis as well as Fascists and anti-Fascists—all of them collected helter-skelter from all over Asia and indiscriminately locked up behind barbed wire as "enemy aliens". The fact that he was the only Muslim among so many non-Muslims contributed, if anything, according to him to the intensity of his preoccupation with the cultural and intellectual problems of his community and the spiritual environment which he had chosen for himself as early as 1926. From September 1946 to February 1947 he edited the periodical *Arafat* published in Lahore. As was evident from its

¹ Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, 4; Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 45.

² Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 1-2, and 311; Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 45.

³ See *Islamic Culture* (July 1927); *Islamic Culture* 10 (July and October 1936); *Islamic Culture* 11 (January, April, and October 1937); *Islamic Culture* 12 (January and April 1938). *Islamic Culture* is published until now in Hyderabad, India. Its publication was encouraged by a group of people in "His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Dominions" with the aim of disseminating true knowledge about Islam.

Law.¹

When Pakistan was born in 1947, Asad was undersecretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs. He was a permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva. His wife, Pola Hamida, an American from New York, was in the same year. It was also there that he began his writing. *Road to Mecca* (1954), covering the first 15 years of conversion to Islam in 1926 and his last 15 years of Arabia to Mecca in the late summer of 1953.

After two years in New York, Asad returned to Pakistan in 1955. He was then spurred them on, first to Morocco, then to Spain. In *The Principles of Islam* (1961), Asad laid down the foundations of an Islamic state on the basis of the Prophet's sayings. Briefly, the two conditions are that in an Islamic state true sovereignty must be exercised through mutual consultation. Within this framework, an Islamic state had the flexibility to accommodate democracy and the rule of law, including the presidency and the Supreme Court. Corruption in Islam is not necessarily an attempt to reform Islam, but modeled along the lines of previous dynasties.

The author hoped with this book to provide a better understanding of Islamic ideology by the author. It is an understanding so vitally needed in our time and extreme pictures of several orientalist writers. Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Steven Erlanger,

and Islamic states, Asad's book should be required reading for these "experts" from academe and the media.¹

The Message of the Qur'an was published in 1980. Asad meant to devote two years to completing the translation and the commentary but ended up spending 17 years doing so. He dedicated *The Message* to "people who think," and in his foreword for *The Message of the Qur'an*, he mentions two main reasons for the lack of appreciation of the Qur'an in the Western world, in spite of its undeniable and ever-increasing interest in all that concerns the world of Islam. The first reason is the Qur'anic stress on "reason as a valid way to faith as well as its insistence on the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical (and, therefore, also social) spheres of human existence: the inseparability of man's daily actions and behaviour, however 'mundane', from his spiritual life and destiny. This absence of any division of reality into 'physical' and 'spiritual' compartments makes it difficult for people brought up in the orbit of other religions, with their accent on the 'supernatural' element allegedly inherent in every true religious experience, to appreciate the predominantly rational approach of the Qur'an to all religious questions." "In short," Asad says, "the Westerner cannot readily accept the Qur'anic thesis that all life, being God-given, is a unity, and that problems of the flesh and of the mind, of sex and economics, of individual righteousness and social equity are intimately connected with the hopes which man legitimately entertains with regard to his life after death." Second, perhaps ever more decisive, is the fact that "*the Qur'an itself has never yet been presented in any European language in a manner which would make it truly comprehensible.*"²

Asad tries to explain why this lack of understanding occurred by pointing out that the authors of the long list of translations— whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims were or are people who acquired their knowledge of Arabic through academic study alone: that is, from books. None of them, according to him, however great his scholarship, has ever been familiar with the Arabic language as a person is familiar with his own, having absorbed the nuances of its idioms and its phraseology with an active, associative response within himself, and hearing it with an ear spontaneously attuned to the intent underlying the acoustic symbolism of its words and sentences. His own translation and explanation, *The Message of the Qur'an*, is based on a lifetime of study and of many years

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, vii; Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 46.

² *The Message of the Qur'an*, ii-iii; Asad, *This Law of Ours*. 187-188.

say the Qur'an has been revealed for me," he said in an interview a few years before his death. Moreover, he was fond of quoting the Prophetic *hadith* that: "If you use your reason and turn out to be wrong, God will still reward you. And if you are right, you will be doubly rewarded."¹

Asad also bestows an important place to the *Sunnah* (Prophet's tradition) as recorded in the authentic *hadiths*.² This not only appears in almost all of his writings, but also in his translation and explanation of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the most important compilation of Traditions.³ Asad's translation and explanation of it is part of his endeavour to make Muslims acquire a better understanding of the Word of God (the Qur'an) and the Example of the Prophet. For Asad, a genuine revival of Islam is impossible without an intensive enquiry into its original spirit. Muslims, according to him, must build further and higher on the foundations supplied by past generations of scholars and thinkers. Indeed, he cannot accept the idea that the teachings of Islam could ever be exhausted in all their depth. No word of anyone below the Prophet, in Asad's view, can ever be considered to be final. Muslims are but travellers aiming at new discoveries in the domain of the spirit of Islamic

Government, 11-17.

¹ Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 46.

² For Asad, there are at least three distinct reasons for the institution of *Sunnah*. The first reason—this is the individual aspect of the *Sunnah*—is the training of human beings, in a methodical way to live permanently in a state of consciousness, wakefulness and self-control. The second is its social importance and utility considering that social conflicts are due to human beings' misunderstanding each other's actions and intentions. The cause of such misunderstandings is the extreme variety of temperaments and inclinations of the individual members of the society. The *Sunnah* enables members of society to be systematically induced to make their habits and customs resemble each other, however different their social or economic status be in each case. Moreover, the *Sunnah* makes society coherent and stable in form and precludes the development of antagonisms and conflicts. Therefore by following the example set by the Prophet every Muslim will mould his personality to that of the Prophet and other Muslims in such a way as to reinforce the latter's spiritual influence on the *ummah*. The Prophet is thus not only the bearer of moral revelation but also the guide towards a perfect life. See Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, 139-149.

³ Imam Abu 'Abd-Allah Muhammad Ibn Isma'il al-Bukhāri, *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*, trans. and expln. Muhammad Asad (Lahore: Arafat Publications, 1938; reprint, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993). One part of this *Sahih al-Bukhari's* translation initially had been published in *Islamic Culture* 12 (January-April 1938): 98-107.

teachings, and the more Muslim's worldly knowledge increases, the more new and hitherto hidden meanings appear in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*,¹ he declared.

In 1987, Asad published *This Law of Ours and Other Essays*, a collection of articles on Muslim religious and political thought he had written over the years but had not published, including "Answers of Islam," "Calling All Muslims," "The Attitude of Religions Towards One Another," and "A Vision of Jerusalem." In fact, it was his wife, Pola Hamida, who discovered them after going through some of his old papers and recognizing their importance insisted that they be published. "I believe the reader will be struck, as I have been," she wrote in the foreword to the book, "not only by the extraordinary timeliness and the timelessness of these thoughts and predictions, but also by their consistency."²

Asad sees that one of the most important themes in Islamic doctrine is the historical continuation of and inner connection between the various forms and phases of divine revelation. The essence of their teachings, according to him, was always identical, and so it can be said that all of them proclaimed one and the same faith. Based on a Qur'anic verse (Q. 5:48), Asad believes that: "For every one of you [i.e., for every one of your communities] have We appointed a [different] divine law and an open road". And, on the basis of another Qur'anic verse,³ he emphasizes that the sincere followers of earlier revealed religions (like Jews and Christians) can be regarded as righteous in the Qur'anic sense of this term—provided that they believe in God's transcendental oneness and uniqueness, are fully conscious of their responsibility to Him, and really live in accordance with these tenets.⁴

Asad also feels the need and desirability for a better, deeper understanding between the world of Islam and the Occident in the interest of the whole world and the world's future. He points out to mutual distrust as the main obstacle for the two worlds to have a better mutual understanding and as close as possible a collaboration to be

¹ Asad, "Preface to the First Edition (1938)," in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vi-vii.

² Pola Hamida Asad, "Foreword," in Asad, *This Law of Ours*, x-xi.

³ "Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve" (Q. 2:62).

⁴ Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 153-154.

brought about. Moreover, he expects that Muslims, Christians and Jews will be able to bring forth, from within each of their existing societies, the strength to conceive and maintain truly spiritual, religious patterns of thought and feeling which alone could withstand the onslaught of materialism. He also admits that the history of Christendom is at least as full of wars and violence as the history of the Muslim world. Hence, he concludes that it is the moral duty of the Muslims to bring the intellectual premises of Islam closer to the understanding of the Christians, and that Christians should approach the problems of the Islamic world in the same spirit of justice and fair-play as they approach, and demand for their own concerns. Asad believes that as soon as these requirements are fulfilled, both the Christians and the Muslims will fully realise that the ethical outlook which the two great religions hold in common is of greater importance than the differences apparent in their doctrines.¹

In the context of the attitude of religions towards one another and, or, of religious pluralism, Asad bases his views on his understanding of the Qur'an. He, for example, interprets *Islam* and *Muslim* as denoting human being's "self surrender to God" and "one who surrenders himself to God", without limiting these terms to any specific denomination.² On the basis of this understanding he also interprets the term *kāfir*, which is usually equated with *unbeliever* or *infidel*, as one who denies (or refuses to acknowledge) the truth in the widest, spiritual sense.³ This interpretation of the two Qur'anic terms appears as

¹ Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 121-128.

² Asad cautions that "in each and every case, the religious terms used in the Qur'an in the sense which they have acquired after Islam had become 'institutionalized' into a definite set of laws, tenets and practices. However legitimate this 'institutionalization' may be in the context of Islamic religious history, it is obvious that the Qur'an cannot be correctly understood if we read it merely in the light of later ideological developments, losing sight of its original purport and the meaning which it had—and was intended to have—for the people who first heard it from the lips of the Prophet himself." See Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, vi.

³ Asad says in this respect as follows: "In other words, the term *kāfir* cannot be simply equated, as many Muslim theologians of post-classical times and practically all Western translators of the Qur'an have done, with 'unbeliever' or 'infidel' in the specific, restricted sense of one who rejects the system of doctrine and law promulgated in the Qur'an and amplified by the teachings of the Prophet—but must have a wider, more general meaning. . . a *kāfir* is one who denies [or 'refuses to acknowledge'] the truth in the widest, spiritual sense of this latter term: that is, irrespective of whether it relates to a cognition of the

a result of Asad's hermeneutic of the Qur'an which has been the overriding principle which has guided him throughout his work. The message of the Qur'an, according to him, must be rendered in such a way as to reproduce, as closely as possible, the sense which it had for the people who were as yet unburdened by the conceptual images of later Islamic developments.¹

Interestingly, Asad was not only a man of thought but also a man of action. Beside being a Pakistani diplomat (Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations), he also took part in the effort to help the Sanusi Order struggle against the Italians in North Africa. The Sanusis had fought the Italians since 1911 when the latter invaded Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Therefore, on the request of Sayyid Ahmad, the leader of the Sanusi Order, Asad went to Cyrenaica, Libya to find out what could be done to help the struggle. He met, in January of 1931, the famous Sidi 'Umar al-Mukhtār, who was entrusted by Sayyid Ahmad and Sayyid Idris to lead the struggle, to device plans on how to continue their struggle.² And, although there was almost nothing he could do to help the Sanusis because it was too late to help them, Asad did show his readiness to accept all the consequences of becoming a Muslim. He reflected on his secret trip to Cyrenaica, in which two encounters with the Italians almost took his life, as follows:

“When I had come to know Islam and accepted it as my way of life, I had thought that all my questioning and searching had come to an end. Only gradually, very gradually, did I become aware that this was not the end: for to accept a way of life as binding for oneself was, to me at least, inextricably bound up with a desire to pursue it among like-minded people—and not only to pursue it in a personal sense but also to work for its social fruition within the community of my choice. To me, Islam was a way and not an end—and the desperate guerrillas of

supreme truth—namely, the existence of God—or to a doctrine or ordinance enunciated in the divine writ, or to a self-evident moral proposition, or to an acknowledgment of, and therefore gratitude for, favours received.” See Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 907. n. 4. For a concrete contemporary historical application of the terms *islam* and *kāfir* as understood by Asad, see Farid Esack, *Qur'an. Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld. 1997), 126-144.

¹ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, vi.

² Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 312-343.

'Umar al-Mukhtār were fighting with their lifeblood for the freedom to tread that way, just as the Companions of the Prophet had done thirteen centuries ago. To be of help to them in their hard and bitter struggle, however uncertain the outcome, was as personally necessary to me as to pray...'¹

Hasan Zillur Rahim, editor of the quarterly magazine *IQR*, published in San Jose, California, had the good fortune of corresponding with Asad. In 1986, he had read *The Road to Mecca* and was so moved and persuaded by Asad's narrative that he resolved to somehow make contact with the latter. And, soon after that he came across an interview with Asad in a magazine called *Arabia*, published out of England. He wrote a letter to the editor of *Arabia* to forward to Asad and to his amazement, Asad soon replied from Spain. "I was deeply touched by your letter." Asad wrote, "which was forwarded to me by Dr. Fathi Osman. Thank you for your appreciation of my work; it is for people like you that I am writing." In his letter Rahim expressed the hope that Asad continue his life story from where he left off in *The Road to Mecca*. "I have promised my wife, who has been insisting for a long time," he replied, "that I should continue and complete my memoirs. My next work will be just that and of course it will, of necessity, include my years in India and Pakistan... Please pray that God will allow me to accomplish this work."²

After Asad died in Spain in 1992, Rahim wrote to Pola Hamida Asad, who informed him that the sequel to *The Road to Mecca* was only partially completed by Asad—part one—and that she herself would complete part two. It would be called *Homecoming of the Heart*, "a title which he himself suggested."³

Muhammad Asad stood alone among contemporary Muslims for his extraordinary perception of, and contribution to Islam. With his command of the English language, his knowledge of the Bible and biblical sources, as well as Jewish history and civilization, Asad was more successful than most in communicating to both Muslim and non-Muslim readers the essence of Islam in both its historical and timeless context.⁴ But beyond words and books, Asad wanted to see the living

¹ Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, 327.

² Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 46.

³ "Muhammad Asad," 50-51; Rahim, "Muhammad Asad," 46.

⁴ "Muhammad Asad," *Arabia*, 5 no. 61, 49-51. In 1985 Asad wrote an article as a response to Kamal Salibi's book which holds that the kingdoms of Solomon

body of Islam flourish in the modern world. And, although distressed by the sad state of the Muslim world and its reactive agenda, he remained optimistic to the end that a new set of Muslims would eventually rise to make his dream a reality.¹

Asad was not blind to the mistakes of many Muslims and severely criticized the fanaticism and rigidity of current Islamic movements. Moreover, he felt compelled to intervene in the debates on religious reformation. Indeed, in an interview conducted by the journal *Arabia* (September 1986) he warned the "Islamic movement" against a total repudiation of Western civilization and its achievements. Were that to happen, in Asad's view, the Islamic world would rob itself of the benefits which it could derive from this civilization for its own advantage. As people were learning to use their own intellects in the schools and universities of the Western world, no Muslim should be ashamed of deciding to attend these places of training and education. According to Asad, he himself, would probably never have gone over to Islam had he not learned to use his mind at European schools.² In this

and David, and the site of the first Temple, lie not in Palestine at all but in a fertile coastal strip south of Mecca. Based on his knowledge of the Bible and its history Asad rejected that theory by saying in his conclusion that "what Salibi advances as a 'theory' cannot be taken seriously" inasmuch as it does not in the least increase our understanding of Biblical history but, on the contrary only confuses the reader." See Muhammad Asad, "The Tribe that Kept Its Name," *Arabia*, January 1985/Rabi' Al-Thani 1405, 82-84. See Kama! Salibi. *The Bible Came from Arabia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).

¹ His talk in Radio Beromünster, Switzerland. 1960 is entitled "Islam and the Spirit of Ours Times," and included in *This law of Ours*: 129-135.

² "Muhammad Asad," 55. M. Salim Abdullah, "What shall be the Answer to Contemporary Islamic Fundamentalism?," *Concilium* (June 1992): 76. Asad's knowledge of Islam and Muslim society before he eventually became a Muslim, was a result of his journey to the Middle East. This experience was published in a book entitled *Unromantisches Morgenland*. Because of the book and some of his articles—especially those dealing with the intricate religious psychology of the Iranians—had come to the attention of prominent orientalist scholars and received more than passing recognition, as well as on the strength of this achievement, he was invited to deliver a series of lectures at the Academy of Geopolitics in Berlin—where he was told that it had never happened before that a man of his age (he was not yet twenty-six) had been accorded such a distinction. Other articles of more general interest had been reproduced, with the permission of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*; by many other newspapers. One article had even been reprinted nearly thirty times. Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 185, 299-300, and 307.

connection he also attacked those groups of Muslims who attempt to emphasize their Islamic identities by external means such as by wearing special clothing. In this way, he argued, many of these so called 'Islamists' had fallen back into a period which belonged five or six hundreds years in the past. Moreover, the life-style which they practiced could not be attributed either to the Prophet Muhammad or to his companions. Rather, it was derived from the time of the Abbasids and Mamluks, i. e. a time of decline.¹

Rahim imagines how Asad would respond to the peaceful yet vigorous activism of American Muslims in defending the tenets of their faith and in striving to bring a balance to American society. Asad would, Rahim writes, approve of it, and he would, in particular, have invested high hopes on Muslim youth for their idealism and their ability and eagerness to think and reason. Asad abhorred extremism in all its forms. "And thus We have willed you to be a community of the Middle Way" (Q. 2:143) was a Qur'anic verse he often quoted, explaining that as a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes and is realistic in its appreciation of human nature and of possibilities, the *ummah* rejects both licentiousness and exaggerated asceticism. He also explains that in Islam, there is no room for revolution, only evolution. Asad was also the conscience of thinking Muslims. "The door of *ijtihad* will always remain open," he used to say, "because no one has the authority to close it."²

¹ "Muhammad Asad," 55. M. Salim Abdullah, "What shall be the Answer to Contemporary Islamic Fundamentalism?," 76. Asad further criticizes the emotional upheaval which is so characteristic of the present-day Muslim world as completely incoherent and confused. He says that "To desire a return to an Islamic reality is one thing; but to visualise that reality in all its aspects is another. Mere slogans will not help us in our dilemma. The dream of an Islamic 'revolution' (a Western concept artificially implanted in Muslim minds) can only lead to an exacerbation of the many existing conflicts within our *ummah*, and thus to a deepening of chaos in which we now find ourselves. And the same goes for the assertion that this or that Muslim country has already attained to the status of an Islamic state by virtue of nothing more than the introduction of *hijab* for women and of *shari* punishment (*hudud*) for certain crimes, and the assumption of governmental power by groups of self-appointed 'guardians of Islam' who conceive themselves—after Western patterns and against all truly Islamic tenets—as a body of ordained clergy..." He closes this criticism by saying that "emotion alone will not bring us closer to our goal." Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 3.

² "Muhammad Asad," 53; Rahim. "Muhammad Asad," 46; Asad. *This Law of Ours*, 3 and 195; Asad, "Preface to the Second Edition." in *Sahih al-Bukhari*,

Lastly, it must be said that Asad is an excellent spokesperson of Islam in the West, and symbolises bridge-building between east and west. He is capable of talking to both worlds in their own languages, both literally and figuratively. He spoke German, Arabic, French, Persian, Spanish, Urdu, and Portuguese, while writing mainly in English. Speaking these languages implies that he knows how people of different civilizations act, and this makes Asad an extraordinary perceptive interpreter of his faith. Asad has demonstrated that it is possible to be cultured, knowledgeable intellectual and to be a Muslim; showing that Islam, properly lived and taught, is neither backward, obscure, nor occult, but coherent, rational, and in accordance with reality. Asad, in fact, has helped more than anybody else during this century to make Islam respectable in the West. As Islam enters the most critical phase of its development in the West, Muhammad Asad's legacy assumes an urgency no thinking Muslim can afford to ignore.¹

CHAPTER II

ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT IN HISTORY

In the history of Islam, political thought has not been an independent discipline aspiring to the utmost heights of intellectual speculation. Traditionally, Muslims rarely studied politics in isolation from related disciplines; but they discussed it as part of the comprehensive treatises on jurisprudence and theology.² It is also interesting to note that the differences among the schools of Islamic law and especially theology, sprang up, among other reasons, because of

Asad. 30, n. 118.

¹ "Muhammad Asad," 49-51; Rahim. "Muhammad Asad," 46.

² Ann K. S. Lambton. *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists*, London Oriental Series vol. 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1; Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. Modern Middle East Series, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982: 3rd paperback printing, 1991), 3; A. K. S. Lambton, "Islamic Political Thought," in Joseph Schacht and C. E. Bosworth, eds., *The Legacy of Islam*, 26. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). 404; Cf. John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* 3rd ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 28-29.

political conflicts.¹ This chapter will discuss various politico-religious schools and political thinkers, and their views on three most important elements in Islamic political thought: caliph or *imam*, *Shari'ah* and *ummah*.

A. The Emergence of Politico-Religious Differences

When prophet Muhammad died in Medina in 632, no formal arrangements had been made for the continuation of the body politic he had created. Contemporary Muslims were thus confronted with the question of succession to his position as the leader of the community. After some discussion the Muslims of Medina and the Meccan Emigrants all agreed to accept as "caliph" (*khalifah*) or "successor" to the Prophet, one of the Emigrants, Abu-Bakr.² During his rule the revolts were quelled, and the Muslim state was ready to embark on, or rather to continue, its policy of expansion. Before his death in 634 C. E., Abu-Bakr appointed 'Umar as his successor by saying that he was "the best among the Muslims."³

Territorial expansion took place steadily throughout 'Umar's reign and until the fall of the Umayyad dynasty. At this early stage in the expansion certain administrative measures were taken, without which the expansion would not have been so great. 'Umar died in 644 C. E. at about 52 years of age, leaving a panel of Medinese leaders to choose his

¹ Abul A'la Maudoodi, "Political Thought in Early Islam," in M. M. Sharif, ed. and intr., *A History of Muslim Philosophy: With Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 665.

² However, there is a number of conflicting traditions handed down by chains of reporters on which the partisan jurists have built up their theories. One tradition cited by the *Shi'ah* jurists alleges that while Muhammad was on his death-bed, he asked for paper and pen to dictate his will, but 'Umar did not allow this as Muhammad was said to be in a delirium. The *Shi'ites* also maintain that Muhammad wanted to nominate 'Ali as his successor. The other tradition cited by the Sunni jurists in support of the claims of Abu Bakr says that the Prophet, soon after he was incapacitated by illness, used to delegate his authority of leading prayers on Fridays to Abu Bakr. Accordingly, Sunni jurists have tended to deduce that Muhammad had implicitly chosen Abu Bakr as his successor. See S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Essex and Beirut: Longman Group Ltd. and Librairie du Liban, 1979), 1-23.

³ W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 113-114; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought: the Basic Concepts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968; reprint paperback ed., 1987), 36.

successor. They chose the weakest among themselves, 'Uthman b. 'Affan, the pious early convert and son-in-law of the Prophet. The latter continued 'Umar's policies but with less skill. 'Uthman could not avoid, as 'Umar had, allowing the richest Meccan families to go to the provinces, especially Iraq, and make business ventures there to the annoyance of the less advantaged local Arabs. And, even though he managed to reverse this tendency by forcing those who had begun to leave to transfer their investments back to the Hijaz, complaints began to mount up after some years, especially at Fustat and Kufah.¹

Moreover, many people began to complain of 'Uthman's tendency to nepotism, seeing in a clique of his relatives of Banu Umayyah the cause of all their grievances. Indeed 'Uthman had given his relatives and their associates a near monopoly of top posts, often letting himself be dominated by them. This made him unpopular with the Anṣār families of Medina. Finally, some in the garrison towns complained of the financial system itself, which 'Umar had set up but which began to fall apart under 'Uthman. In 656 C. E. the discontent culminated, and after a period of general negotiation and counterplotting, a group of Arab soldiers from Egypt forced their way into 'Uthman's house and killed him.²

Thereupon began a five-year period of *fitnah*, "temptation" or "trials", a time of civil war for the control of the Muslim community and its vast territories. 'Ali b. Abi-Ṭālib, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, who had been passed over when 'Uthman was elected, was the most respected Muslim in Medina, and was acclaimed as caliph in the Mosque by such Muslims as were present in the city.³

'Ali, however, had not been recognized in Syria and Mu'awiyah b. Abi-Sufyan, as governor there, took up the call for revenge for 'Uthman, his cousin. This refusal to acknowledge 'Ali led to a military confrontation in the region between Syria and Iraq. This confrontation took place in 657 at Siffin but was inconclusive because Mu'awiyah's men, who were threatened with defeat, put Qur'an on the ends of their lances and called for arbitration according to God's word. The arbitration which followed failed, and before there was any decisive military encounter, 'Ali was assassinated. After a weak attempt by 'Ali's

¹ Watt, *What is Islam?* 114-115; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History*: vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961; paperback ed., 1974). 212-213.

² Hodgson. *Venture* 1, 213-214; Watt, *Political Thought*, 36.

³ Hodgson. *Venture* 1, 214; Watt, *Political Thought*, 36.

son, al-Hasan, to gain the caliphate, Mu'awiyah was speedily recognized everywhere as caliph, and thus became founder of the Umayyad dynasty.¹

The civil war between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah created major splits among the Muslim community, and had a direct bearing on the conception of the ruler and the conduct of the state. Five major religious-political schools of thought grew out of that civil war: (1) Kharijites or *Khawārij*,² (2) the *Shi'ah* or Shi'ites,³ (3) The Murji'tes or *Murji'ah*,⁴ (4) Mu'tazilites or *Mu'tazilah*,⁵ and (5) *Ahl-al-Sunnah wa'l- Jama'ah* or Sunnites.⁶

¹ Hodgson, *Venture* 1, 214; Watt, *What is Islam?*, 113; Watt, *Political Thought*, 36-37.

² The first Kharijis were a small group of people who "went out" or dissented from 'Ali because they disapproved of some of his acts, namely, submitting to an arbitration in which he was cheated by a diplomatic trick although being in the right. Rahman, *Islam*, 168; Watt, *What is Islam?* 117; Hodgson, *Venture* 1, 214; Watt, *Political Thought*, 54.

³ The word *Shi'ah* means "party", and the complete phrase should be Shi'at 'Ali, "the party of 'Ali", but this party was sufficiently outstanding to be known simply as "the party". Its followers were called *Shi'i* to indicate that they were supporters of 'Ali. Watt, *Political Thought* 43-44; Mahmood Shehabi, "Shi'a." in Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *Islam—The Straight Path: Islam Interpreted by Muslims* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987), 180.

⁴ The Murji'tes (*Murji'ah*) were people who had regained neutral in the civil wars (*fitnah*) between the *Khawārij*, *Shi'ah*, and the Umayyad regime. These people, called the Murji'tes (*Murji'ah*, i.e. those who 'postponed' judgment on people until the Last Day) recommended that one should desist from passing judgment on a grave sinner whose fate will be decided by God. See Rahman, *Islam* 86; Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1988; reprint, 1989), 105.

⁵ The *Mu'tazilah* was a group of theologians in the reign of al-Ma'mun (813-833) known to Islamic history as the *Mu'tazilla* (*Mu'tazilites*), "the Seceders," who made use of Greek philosophical concepts in their intellectual defence of Islamic doctrines. Watt, *Political Thought*, 82-89; see also Lambton, *State and Government*, 36-37.

⁶ The term *Sunni* is short for *Ahl al-Sunnah wa Al'jama'ah* ("People of the Sunnah and the Community"). It is used to refer to the large majority of Muslims, who were considered or equated by some scholars with the Islamic orthodoxy. Fazlur Rahman, for instance, translated the term as "the people of the middle path and unity", and called them the orthodoxy. Rahman, *Islam*, 167 and 169; Cf. Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 671-672. Watt, however, has said that the term "orthodox" applies in the first place to Eastern Christendom, where there was an authority to say what was "orthodoxy" or "right belief" and what

1. The Concept of the Caliphate

The main religio-political issues in the first and second centuries of Islam revolved around the question of the election and deposition of the Caliph or Imam.¹ The terms *khalifah* and *imam* are largely interchangeable, but to the extent that a distinction can be made, the former is applied primarily to the supreme leader of the *Ummah* exercising the temporal functions of the Prophet, while the latter is applied to him in his capacity as religious leader.² Since, however, the two functions are theoretically vested in a single individual and since Islam, in theory, does not admit a separation of religion and politics, of faith and authority, the distinction seems inadequate.³ Therefore, we will use both terms synonymously and interchangeably.

In practice the term *khalifah* gradually developed its meaning from "successor to the Prophet" to "vicegerent of God" as the office

was "heresy". He maintained that in Islam there was no such authority. Therefore he preferred to avoid the term "orthodox" in Islamic studies. What existed in Islam, according to him, was the main or central body of opinion in the various schools or sections of the community. The question, according to Watt, is not whether orthodoxy viz. un-orthodoxy exists or not, but whether there is a central or core opinion in Islam or not? Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 19. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973). 72.

¹ Lambton, "Political Thought," 406.

² Etymologically, the word *khalifah* stems from the root word *khalafa*, meaning to "come after someone." *Khalifah* in its most common usage means successor viz. successor to the Prophet. In the political terminology of Sunnism, *Khalifah* refers to the prophets and his successors' temporal rule rather than their religious leadership. Meanwhile *imam* etymologically means "leader" and is basically a person who leads congregational prayers. In Shi'ah, the title of imam is essentially conferred on 'Ali and his legitimate Qurayshi successors. See Manzooruddin Ahmed, "The Classical Muslim State." *Islamic Studies* 1 (September 1962): 93; E. van Douzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat. eds. *Encyclopedia of Islam*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1978). s. v. "khalifa," by Ann. K. S. Lambton; Mehran Tamadonfar. *The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership* (Boulder, San Francisco and London: Westview Press, 1989). 78 and 93.

³ In Sunnism *imam* also means leader and plays the same role as the caliph. See Ahmed "The Classical Muslim State," 93; Mehran Tamadonfar. *The Islamic Polity*, 78 and 93; Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs (London and New York: Routledge. 1988), 61; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 3 and 28; Lambton, "Political Thought," 404; Watt, *Political Thought*, 26-29.

itself grew in importance and changed its character.¹ The authority of the *imam* or *khalifah* was thus derived not from the community, but directly from God, who as sole Head of the Community, alone has the power to confer authority of any kind.² This is in violation of the generally accepted view that the consent and approval of the *ummah* is necessary for a valid assumption of the office.³ Thus in a later development, during the second century of the *hijrah* to be precise, a great deal of confusion and inconsistency with regard to the term *khalifah* ensued.⁴

The aforementioned religio-political schools had different conceptions of the caliphate/imamate and conditions of the leadership. The Khawarij held the imamate to be compulsory; that to set up an *imam* and to submit to him is a necessity.⁵ Being egalitarians, the Kharijis rejected the view that the office of the Caliph, if there is a need or a necessity for it, must be confined to a member of the tribe of Quraysh

¹ Watt, *Political Thought*, 32-34.

² Muslim jurists and theologians justified their usage of the term *khalifah* or the highest political authority, on the Qur'anic verses: "O David; Behold, We have made thee a [prophet and, thus. Our] vicegerent on earth: judge, then, between people with justice, and do not follow vain desire, lest it lead thee astray from the path of God..." (Q. 38: 26). "Say: 'O God, Lord of all dominion (sovereignty)! Thou grantest dominion (sovereignty) unto whom Thou willest, takest away dominion from whom Thou willest; and Thou exaltest whom Thou willest, and abasest whom Thou willest. In Thy hand is all good. Verily. Thou hast the power to will anything'" (Q. 3:26). H. A. R. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization: The Muslim Community and the State," in Majid Khadduri and Herbert J. Liebesny, eds., *Law in the Middle East*, vol. 1 Origin and Development of Islamic Law (Washington, D. C.: The Middle East Institute, 1955), 4-5; see also Sir Thomas W. Arnold, *The Caliphate*, with a concluding chapter by Sylvia G. Haim (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966; reprint Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 44-45.

³ The "inaugural speech" delivered by Abu Bakr and 'Umar made clear that the political leadership relies on the consent of the "community of the faithful" on the one hand, and subscribed to the priority of a set of divinely revealed laws governing both the rulers and the ruled on the other. Moreover, obedience to the ruler is binding upon the *Ummah* only as long as the ruler upholds the law; however if he violates or ignores the law, the *Ummah* is justified in dismissing him. See Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 662.

⁴ It is well illustrated by Abu Yusuf's address to the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. See H. A. R. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 5-6; See also Erwin. I. J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 14-16.

⁵ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 7.

(the tribe of the Prophet). Anyone duly elected from the Muslim community, from among the honest, even if the individual happens to be a black slave, will be the right Caliph according to them. Moreover, the Caliph must be obeyed so long as he acts rightly, justly and takes care of the administration of the Islamic community. By advocating and declaring this theory, the Kharijites affirmed the democratic principle within the Islamic community. They also maintained that no tribe or race can enjoy any inherited rights more than the other tribes or races.¹

Meanwhile the Shi'ah held that the only lawful successor to Muhammad was his son-in-law 'Ali, who was clearly chosen by the former to assume the leadership of the Muslim community, and that the Imamate must continue within the progeny of Muhammad. The office of the Imam (the term used by the Shi'ah for the Caliph's office) belonged to the Imam alone, for he is entitled to both political leadership and religious authority.² It is not an open office which every Muslim could seek, nor is it left to the choice of the community (*Ummah*). Rather, the office of the Caliph, or the Imam, was ordained by God to 'Ali and to his descendants.³ Thus, the concept of the Imamate later became the main pillar of their faith and the cornerstone of Islam according to the Shi'ite doctrine. They also affirmed that it was the duty of the Prophet to designate the Imam instead of leaving the matter to the discretion of the *Ummah*.⁴

The Murji'i's belief that grave sin in general does not exclude

¹ Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shu'ubiya." in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk, eds. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962; 1st Princeton Paperback, 1982), 66-67; Abdul Malik Ahmed Al-Sayed, "Classical Arabic-Islamic Political Theories of Administration. An Analysis and Evaluation of Their Contemporary Significance." (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1974), 68; Rahman, *Islam*, 169-170.

² Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina. *The Just Ruler (al-sultan al-'adil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 89; Maudoodi. "Political Thought" 66-67.

³ The Imamiyyah and other Shi'i sects asserted that the Imamate was established through the designation of the imam by God through the mouth of the Prophet, and that thereafter each imam chose his successor to this office. They disagreed, however, as to the reason why designation of the imam is indispensable. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 10.

⁴ Shehabi, *Islam—The Straight Path*, 188-189; Watt, *Political Thought* 43-44; Watt, *Philosophy and Theology*, 16-17; Lapidus, *Islamic Society*, 64; Rahman. *Islam*. 173; Gibb. "Constitutional Organization." 8-9.

someone from the community¹ and that salvation depends on faith alone² allowed them to justify the behavior of Muslims, who continued to live under a ruler whose authority they (the Muslims) might not approve of or legalize.³ They also came to believe that political power, because of the doctrines aforementioned and their views on free will and predestination, ought not to be disobeyed because it was ultimately established by God.⁴ By adopting this kind of justification, the Murji'ites tended to disregard the high qualifications and valid procedure prerequisite to the establishment of the imamate, which the other religio-political groups demanded.⁵

The Mu'tazilah, on the other hand, held different opinions concerning the appointment of the Imam or Caliph. Whereas some Mu'tazilites held that the latter's appointment was a religious urgency,⁶ others, opined that the Imam was a superfluous office, and that the institution of such a post was not a religious necessity. Moreover, other Mu'tazilites went even further by saying that no Imam was needed if the community followed the right path.⁷

¹ Watt, *What is Islam?*, 118.

² Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 669.

³ Watt, *Political Thought*, 58-59; Lambton, *State and Government* 32. This Murji'i principle underlined the necessity of the existence of a government to keep the law and order in the land, although they disapproved of it. A view like that of the Murji'i's, which allows for the punishment of criminals without excluding them from the community, is the only possible basis for a normal state. See Watt, *What is Islam?*, 118.

⁴ They advocated that the community avoids rebellion against the *de facto* ruler by correcting his policy through criticism and well-intentioned advice as Muslims had done during the Umayyads and the 'Abbasid dynasties. Rahman, *Islam*, 86; Watt, *Political Thought*, 58-59; Lambton, *State and Government* 32.

⁵ Watt, *Political Thought*, 58-59; Lambton, *State and Government*, 32.

⁶ Those Mu'tazilis who believed in the permanent necessity of an imam were divided into those who supported the imamate of the most excellent (*al-fāḍil*) and those who supported the imamate of the less excellent (*al-maḥḍūl*), Lambton, *State and Government*, 39.

⁷ Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 28; Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 670. Among the Mu'tazilis who held this opinion, it was maintained that power carried with it the temptation to abuse it, and that the deposition of a ruler split the community. Hence it was better, in their view, not to appoint a ruler except when there was some special need to do so, and only for the duration of that need. Abu Bakr 'Abd al-Rahman bin Kaysan (d. 200/816 or 201/817), a Mu'tazili held the view that the ideal community was the community of the righteous, which could do without a ruler. He also added

The choice of the Imam, according to them, rested with the community, and was a necessary step towards the validation of the authority. Moreover, community's approval must be given in order to validate any administrative appointment or action as legal, valid, and binding upon the community. The community's consent can be recognized when the community gives its sanction to a particular individual. Some Mu'tazilites also held that the choice of Caliph should be unanimous, and that in the event of differences and dissensions the appointment should be suspended and held in abeyance.¹

Generally the Mu'tazilah held that any morally qualified and efficient person could be chosen by the Muslim community as Imam or Caliph. The condition of being a Qurayshite, an Arab, or a non-Arab to them was irrelevant.² They also preferred a weak government which could be easily deposed, to one that was bad but strong and firmly established. Later Mu'tazilis, however, maintained that non-Qurayshi could not become imam if a qualified Qurayshi was available.³

Meanwhile the majority of Sunnis argued, as al-Ash'ari did, that the imamate is itself an ordinance of the revealed Law. According to the latter, even though it can be demonstrated by reason that subordination to it is admissible, the necessity for it was clearly stated in Revelation.

that people would not have a need for an imam were they not prone to teach each other unjustly. According to him, a theoretical universal knowledge of the Qur'an should be sufficient for keeping society in order, but reality being imperfect. Muslims always chose somebody as their imam. Lambton, *State and Government*, 38 and 39.

¹ Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 670. Al-Samm said that for the Imam's appointment to be valid, the *ijmā'* of all Muslims is necessary. Once appointed, the election then becomes irreversible, even if a more excellent (*afdal*) candidate appeared. Consequently, armed resistance to a ruler was only allowed if the ruler had seized power in an unjust way and if the leader of the rebellion had been agreed upon by the consensus. Lambton, *State and Government*, 37-38.

² Dirār, an independent theologian of the second century connected with the beginnings of the Mu'tazili movement, argued for the legality of the imamate from outside Quraysh, even if a suitable candidate was found from within Quraysh. He said, "If there is equality of condition between the man of Quraysh and the non-Arab, then the non-Arab has the better claim to it, the client being more worthy of it than the true-born Arab." On the other hand, al-Ka'bi, a Mu'tazili (d. 319/931), contemporary of al-Ash'ari, asserted that a Qurayshi had more claim to it than one not of Quraysh who was qualified for it, but if there were danger of civil strife it was lawful to give it to another. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization." 8.

³ Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 670-671: Lambton, *State and Government*, 37.

Furthermore, al-Ash'ari maintained, that the companions of the Prophet were unanimous on its necessity, and in view of their unanimity no regard is to be paid to the opposition of isolated individuals.¹

On the race and tribe of the Imam, the Sunnis maintain that the *shari'ah* has prescribed the attribution of the imamate to Quraysh and has indicated that Quraysh will never fail to produce some member who is qualified for the imamate. Nevertheless it is not lawful to set up an imam for the whole Community from any other group. The argument of the Sunnis for the limitation of the Imamate to Quraysh is the word of the Prophet, "The imams are of Quraysh." It was in deference to this tradition that the Muslims of Medina surrendered the succession to Quraysh on the occasion of the election of Abu Bakr.²

There was disagreement on the method whereby the imamate is to be established, and whether it is to be by designation or by election. The vast majority of Sunnis held that the method of its establishment is to be by election on the part of the Community, through the exercise of responsible judgment (*ijtihad*) by those of them who are qualified to do so and their selection of one who is fitted for the office.³

Concerning the qualifications of the caliph, Abu Hanifah maintained that the former should be a free Muslim male, well versed in religion, and sound in body and mind. Abu Hanifah equally asserted that governors, judges, *muftis* (pronouncers of legal verdicts), and arbiters must be just, morally irreproachable, and compassionate. If a person who lacks any of these virtues comes to office, his caliphate will be null and void and the public will owe him no obedience. However notwithstanding his usurpation of power, if the social dealings and obligations of the caliph's administration are executed by pious Muslims in accordance with the *Shari'ah* and the decisions of the judges

¹ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 7.

² Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 8-9. Abu Hanifah also held this view not because this office was constitutionally the exclusive right of that tribe but because of the particular circumstances of that period in history. Abul A'la Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah Abu Yusuf," in M. M. Sharif, ed. and intr., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 684.

³ Abu Hanifah maintained that the Caliph must be chosen by consultation and in conference with the wise who are entitled to give opinion (*ahl al-rā'y*). The seizure of power by force and the acquisition of allegiance under duress, according to him, are invalid and constituted usurpation. Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 682. It should be noted, however, that this method is only theoretical. In practice, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs, who are Sunnis, designated their successors as the most Shi'ite Imam did.

appointed by him are just, these decisions are to take effect and to be considered valid.¹

The Concept of the *Shari'ah*

Before delving into the *Shari'ah*, we have to illustrate the principle ultimate authority according to Islamic political doctrines. Ultimate authority according to the Islamic doctrines, belongs to God, whose sovereignty covers the universe as a whole.² Thus, the Islamic polity is under the ultimate sovereignty of God. The Head of the *Ummah* is God, and God alone. God's role is immediate, and God's commands, as revealed to Muhammad, embody the Law and Constitution of the *Ummah*.³ In practical terms Divine authority means the *Shari'ah*. It sets certain limits on the legislative authority in the Islamic polity: regulates the behavior and authority of rulers; and protects the interests of their subjects.⁴

The *Shari'ah* for the most part, embodies a set of general principles and, as such, is subject to interpretation. The authority to interpret and preserve the *Shari'ah* resides with the community which has repeatedly exercised this authority.⁵ The exercise of such an authority is quite evident in Muslim historical records. Moreover, given the fact that neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah of the Prophet profferes precise instructions as to the forms and institutions by which the unity of the *Ummah*, as a political organization, should be expressed and maintained. It was upon the authority of the *Ummah*, as expressed

¹ Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 683.

² The Qur'an announces that God is Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and of human beings, and particularly the giver of guidance to human beings. It is God who judges them, individually and collectively, and metes out to them merciful justice (Q. 3:26; 2:254-255; 59: 22-24).

³ Since Muhammad is the messenger of God and the prophet, he also has authority. He is entitled to obedience because God makes it mandatory for all human beings to obey him. It is the office of prophethood, therefore, and not the character of Muhammad himself, that gives him authority (Q. 4:59; 33:21).

⁴ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 3; Cf. Gustave E. von Grunebaum. *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, 2d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1953; Phoenix Books, 1961). 142; Cf. Muhammad Mahmoud Rabi', *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967). 78.

⁵ See. E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Some Aspects of Islamic Political Thought," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 22, no. 1 (January 1948): 1; Cf. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern*, 12-13.

through the idea of *ijma'* (consensus), that Muslims decided to elect Abu Bakr as the first caliph and successor to the Prophet.¹

The *Shari'ah* is a set of divinely ordained laws enunciated in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* to govern the behavior of human beings in this life and prepare them for the Hereafter. The significant implication of such a law is its *a priori* character. It is not the law which exists to preserve the state, but on the contrary, it is the state which exists for the sake of the law.² So, even though the Imam or Caliph is the means whereby the Law is translated from the sphere of potentiality into actuality and provided with temporal sanctions, he does not embody it, since it exists independently of him and of his will and he himself is subject to it.³ Despite the wide power, the Caliph is not free from operation of the laws of the *Shari'ah*. Theoretically the Caliph was not superior even to the lowliest person in the eyes of the *Shari'ah*. He is in power to set rules according to the *Shari'ah* but had no power to transgress the same.⁴ In relation to ruler-people relationship, the fundamental loyalty of the Muslim is given not to the Imam but to the *Shari'ah*.⁵

In the history of Islamic political thought the Khawarij were the

¹ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 4. Another historical example which shows that the interpretation of the *shari'ah* resides with the community was the Prophet's conversation with Mu'adh ibn Jabal. Mu'adh answered that he shall exercise his own judgment without the least hesitation if he found nothing concerning (a particular matter) in the Book of God and the *Sunnah* of the God's Apostle. Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; reprint 1993), 24-25. The idea that the Community has authority to interpret the *Shari'ah* is also with the principle of *Shura* (mutual consultation). See Asad, *State and Government*, 43-44; Cf. Muhammed S. El-'Awa', *On the Political System of the Islamic State*, 2d ed., trans. Ahmed Naji al-Imam (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1980), 86-97.

² Paydar, *Aspects of the Islamic State*, 104; Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 657; Cf. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 3. There are several definitions of *shari'ah*. All jurists have agreed that the *Shari'ah* comprises the entire corpus of divinely revealed laws, but there is no agreement upon the precise contents of that corpus. See Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective*, 31-33 and 54-55; Cf. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern*, 12.

³ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 4-5.

⁴ Dr. I. Samanta M.A. Ph.D., *Theories of Government in Islam*, 2d ed. (New Delhi: Enkay Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988), 35; Maudoodi, "Political Thought in Early Islam," 657.

⁵ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 14.

first group to emphasize the importance of the *Shari'ah* in the social and political arenas. Furthermore, the ideas implicit in their movement have contributed significantly to the development of Islamic thought and civilization. Their primary contention was that the affairs of the state and community should be managed in strict accordance with the Qur'an. The Kharijites did not believe in the necessity for the existence of the state in order to manage community affairs. Rather, they believed that Muslims could manage their community affairs and the individual Muslims, could control their behavior by abiding by the right without the need for state authority. Later, some of their notions were eventually accepted by the whole community in the form of the doctrine that all social and political life must be based on the *Shari'ah*, the revealed divine law.¹

The Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate made them rely not only on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, as sources of the *Shari'ah*, but also on an Imam whose functions are, broadly, to guide the community and to preserve and interpret God's law. To the Shi'is, the Imams constitute a continuous divine revelation in Iranian form. The Imam, in their eyes, inherits a secret knowledge and the exclusive authority to interpret the Qur'an and *hadith* and therefore to elaborate the legal system of Islam. The Imam is *ma'sum*, a sinless and infallible guide to religious truth, as well as the sole guide to the esoteric comprehension of the truth.² Furthermore, since his selection was the result of divine inspiration, the Imams are effectively believed to have been designated by God and to have been charged by Him to carry out all the spiritual and temporal functions of the Prophet, save that of prophesy.³

The Mu'tazilah had a distinctive view of the *Shari'ah*. Moreover, they held a controversial view of the Qur'an that is based on the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an. This doctrine seems to have been an offshoot of the first principle of the Mu'tazilah, that is, *al-tawhid* ("unity" or, more correctly, the "assertion of the unity of God"). They rejected the concept of the Qur'an as the Word or Speech of God, or as one of His attributes. Rather, the Mu'tazilah declared the Qur'an to be a created word.⁴

¹ Watt, *Philosophy and Theology*, 12; Al-Sayed, *Classical Arabic-Islamic*, 63.

² Lapidus, *Islamic Society*, 115-117; Rahman, *Islam*, 173-174; Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, 89.

³ Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective*, 73-74.

⁴ Rahman, *Islam*, 89-90; Watt, *Philosophy and Theology*, 49-50; Lapidus, *Islamic Society*, 106.

Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah and the Murji'ah held a view of the *Shari'ah* akin to that of the Khawarij. Abu Hanifah, for instance, who was considered as both a Murji'i and a Sunni, maintained that God is the true sovereign, and Muhammad, the Prophet, is God's accredited vicegerent and must be obeyed.¹ He also affirmed that the *Shari'ah* is the supreme law for the Muslim community and that all must submit to it without reservation. Moreover, since the State, in Islam, exists for the sole purpose of maintaining and enforcing the Law, the caliph as the commander of the believers should act according to it and to the will of the community.² Abu Hanifah, however, saw that the Muslim community at his time had lost its consultative authority and that the Caliphs had diverged from the path of the *Shari'ah* concept.³

The Role of the *Ummah*

Together with the *Shari'ah*, *Ummah* i. e. the Muslim community or the community of believers; is the source of political power. Sovereignty in Islam does not materialize except through a combination of three elements: the *Shari'ah*, the *Ummah*, and the Caliph. The significance of the *Ummah* appears throughout the Qur'an and the history of Islam. Islam owes a great deal of its success to the collective behavior and action of the *Ummah*.⁴ In the Qur'an, the *Ummah* occupies a prominent place. For example, "The Median community" was destined to become a witness to humankind (Q. 2:143). The latter was defined as "the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] humankind who enjoin doing what is right and forbid doing what is wrong and believe in God" (Q. 3:110). This exalted position of the *Ummah* and its ethico-religious mission forms the core of the Islamic polity. Equally important is the high value attached to the preservation

¹ Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf," 688-689.

² Gibb, "Constitutional Organization", 3. See also Joseph Schacht, "The Schools of Law and Later Developments of Jurisprudence," in *Law in the Middle East*, 61.

³ Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 688-689.

⁴ Watt said that the great body of Sunnite Muslims, because of their beliefs about the community, have a deep devotion to it. According to him, it is the community which has given their lives significance, and has given them an identity of which they are proud. Many of the achievements of Islamic culture—such as the elaboration of a vast system of law and morals—have been possible through the energies released by the zeal for the community. Watt, *Political Thought*, 59.

and execution of justice entrusted to the *Ummah* by Allah, which lends a strong moral significance to this community.¹

The significance of the *Ummah* rests in the fact that it embraces all the followers or *jama'ah* bound to one another by religious ties.² Public opinion or *ijmā'* (consensus of the community), as a source of law, endows the members of the community as a whole with a political sovereignty in "their own right."³ It was on the basis of such a right and the exercise of *ijmā'* that Muslims decided to elect Abu Bakr as the first caliph, and successor to the prophet.⁴

In the history of Islamic political thought, there were various views of and different emphases on, the significance of the *Ummah*. The Kharijites were the first to make Muslims more aware of the charismatic nature of their community. The Islamic community was ideally, as they conceived of it, "the people of Paradise", a charismatic community that is divinely founded. This means that it is a community which more or less ensured for its members entry into Paradise, and made life meaningful and significant for them.⁵ These important doctrines, which had characterized the earliest notions of the Kharijites had been taken up by other Muslims after being purged of unsatisfactory aspects. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge that this Khariji conception of the community as a charismatic entity, played an important role in the progressive development of the Qur'anic vision.⁶ This concept also inspired people to work at the elaboration of the *Shari'ah*.⁷

The Shi'i doctrine that the office of the Imam belonged to an Imam from among the progeny of Muhammad, made them abandon the reliance on the community for safe protection.⁸ According to the Shi'ites the Imamate was not an open office which every Muslim could seek, nor was it left to the choice of the community, *Ummah*. Rather, the office of the Caliph, or the Imam, was ordained by God to, 'Ali and his descendants, and it was the duty of the Prophet to institute the *Imam*

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 30.

² Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 3.

³ Bashir ud-Din, "Political Theory of Islam", *Islamic Culture*, vol. 8 (1934): 598.

⁴ Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 4.

⁵ Watt, *What is Islam?*, 117-118; Watt, *Political Thought*, 57-58. For further discussion of Islamic community as charismatic community see Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

⁶ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, 13; Watt, *What is Islam?* 117-118.

⁷ Al-Sayed, *Classical Arabic-Islamic*, 65.

⁸ Watt, *Political Thought*, 43-44; Watt, *What is Islam?*, 120.

instead of leaving the matter to the discretion of the *Ummah*.¹ Since the Imam was held to be divinely protected from committing error, the Shi'ite doctrine of *'ismah* encouraged the autocratic form of the state and government,² and undermined the significance of the *Ummah* in the process of choosing its leader.³

As a result of the Murji'i doctrines concerning sin, faith and work, the latter tended to ignore the role of the community.⁴ Moreover, by denying the *Ummah* the right to judge, the Murji'is also denied people the duty to enjoin the good and forbid the evil and encouraged political quietism.⁵ Nevertheless, due to Kharijite pressure, their (Murji'i) leaders later emphasized the necessity to execute the principle of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil" on the moral rather than the legal plane, and through education rather than civil war.⁶ They shifted the responsibility of the Community to judge a ruler who did wrong to God, and felt that such decisions or judgments must be God's decision on the last day and not a matter of concern to the individual or the community.⁷

Meanwhile the Mu'tazilah, because of their principle of human freedom and responsibility and their belief in the relation between God and human destiny, encouraged people to criticize and even to revolt against unjust rulers. This political attitude was most conspicuous during the early 'Abbasid period. At the time, some Mu'tazilah viewed the Abbasids favorably, while others supported the 'Alid revolts.⁸

¹ Shehabi, "Shi'a" 188-189; Watt, *Political Thought*, 43-44; Watt, *Philosophy and Theology*, 16-17; Rahman, *Islam*, 173; Lapidus, *Islamic Society*, 64.

² Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 666-667.

³ Al-Baghdadi said that the Imamiyyah and other Shi'i sects assert that the method of establishment of the imamate was by designation, although they disagree as to the reason why designation of the imam is indispensable. Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 10.

⁴ Watt, *Political Thought*, 58.

⁵ Another view closely comparable with the one mentioned above was that if one's duty to uphold the right and seem the wrong (*amr bi al-ma'ruf and nahi 'an al-munkar*) required one to bear arms, it was a "trial" to be avoided. It was quite right to check others on wrong conduct, but to speak loudly against the tyranny of government, according to the Murji'ite, was not allowed. Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 670.

⁶ Rahman, *Islam*, 169.

⁷ Watt, *Political Thought*, 58.

⁸ One branch of the Mu'tazilah at the end of the 2nd/8th century even supported the Shi'ah Zaydiyyah. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, 51-52; Rahman, *Islam* 86 and 169; Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 671; Lambton, *State and*

Another fundamental principle of the Mu'tazilah delved into the foundation of justice or righteousness. As a result they regarded themselves as 'the people of unity and justice' (*Ahl al-tawhid wa al-'adl*).¹ This principle consequently made them emphasize that the *Ummah* has the right to refuse holding the Friday or other congregational prayers behind an unrighteous Imam.²

The Mu'tazilah held also the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong) which equally emphasized the significance of the *Ummah*. The Mu'tazilah and others understood this principle as the obligation to maintain justice and oppose injustice by tongue, power, and force. It could also include both moral exhortation of one's fellow-Muslims and the moral criticism of unjust rulers. If all these fail, it was a duty with them to rise in arms against an unjust government provided they had the power to do so and to raise a successful power struggle.³

The Sunni point of view of the *Ummah* can be seen, among others, from the obligation of the Caliph to act according to the *Shari'ah* and the will of the community. Abu Hanifah, for example, firmly maintained that the Caliph must be chosen by consultation and in conference with the wise who are entitled to give opinion.⁴ He also emphasized the need to protect the public right of ownership, and had clear and unambiguous views concerning the separation of the judiciary from the executive and demanded a complete separation between the two spheres of jurisdiction.⁵ He equally emphasized the right and duty to control a ruler and the freedom to do so.⁶

Government 37.

¹ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, 50.

² Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 671.

³ Thus it was that they rose in arms against the Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Yazid (r. 125-126/743-744) and tried to replace him by Yazid bin Walid who espoused their doctrine of secession. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*; 52; Maudoodi, "Political Thought," 671.

⁴ Maudoodi. "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 682

⁵ The Abbasids claimed to be the servants of the *Shari'ah*; however this does not mean that they were subservient to a free and independent judiciary. See N. J. Coulson M.A., *A History of Islamic Law*, Islamic Surveys 2 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964). 37; Maudoodi. "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 685.

⁶ He argued on the basis of an incident during the caliphate of 'Ali. Five persons were arrested and brought before 'Ali on the charge of abusing him openly in the streets of Kufah. One of them was also accused of saying that he would

He also discussed whether or not people were entitled as Muslims to revolt against a tyrannical ruler who transgressed the limits of the *Shari'ah*. The majority of the Sunnis were divided on this point. A large section of the Traditionists (*ahl al-hadith*) allowed people to raise their voices against a tyrant ruler and speak their mind before him but forbade them from rising in rebellion, even if he had to seize power, denied them their lawful rights and indulged in unjust bloodshed and open transgression.¹ Nevertheless Abu Hanifah's opinion on this matter went against the current trend and declared that the caliphate of an unjust ruler was basically wrong and insupportable, and deserved to be overthrown.²

1. Islamic Political Thought in the Medieval Period

Islamic political thought in the medieval period may, broadly speaking, be divided into three major streams or groups that had little or no connection with one another.³ The first may be termed the philosophical stream and may be defined as the attempt on the part of certain Muslim philosophers to recast the political philosophy of Plato into an Islamic mould. This stream made a determined attempt at a real synthesis between Platonic and Islamic concepts on the basis of the common ground of the central position of law in the state, and despite the existence of fundamental differences between the two systems. The second stream is the one that grew out of *Adab*, or belles-lettres, and illustrates the adaptability of Islam to the culture of Iran and the Persian literary genre. The third stream and by far the largest in volume, though not necessarily in influence, is the one which grew out of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and at first centered round the caliphate, that is the theory of the

assassinate him. 'Ali ordered their release. It was said, "But they intended to kill you." He asked in reply: "But should I kill them only for expressing the intention to kill me?" It was added, "But they also abused you." 'Ali said, "If you like you may also abuse them." Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 687-688.

¹ Al-Ash'ari (d. 936), like *Ahl al-hadith*, also opposed armed rebellion against a tyrannical ruler. See Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory of the Caliphate," in *Studies on the Civilization*, 161.

² Maudoodi, "Abu Hanifah and Abu Yusuf," 688. See von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, 167.

³ Tarif Khalidi. *Classical Arab Islam: The Culture and Heritage of the Golden Age* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1985); 103.

caliphate, its origin and purpose.¹

We will hereby discuss briefly the three streams of Islamic political thought. In the philosophical stream we will mainly discuss the political philosophy of al-Fārābi as the first Muslim thinker to have left political writings, either in the form of commentaries or in treatises of his own, based upon Plato. He also profoundly influenced all subsequent Muslim philosophers, in particular Ibn Bāja and Ibn Rushd in Spain, and Ibn Sina in the East, where he himself lived. And, concerning the literary stream, we will discuss the *Siyasat-namah* of Nizam al-Mulk, the prime minister (vizier) of the Seljuqs. In the juristic stream we will discuss the political thought of al-Māwardi, al-Ghazāli, Ibn Jama'ah, Ibn Taymiyah, and Ibn Khaldun. In addition, the political thought of the Shi'ites will also be discussed.

The Political Philosophy of al-Fārābi

Medieval Muslim philosophers occupy a special position in the realm of political thought. This position may be described as an intermediary one between the theological-juristic treatment of the state on the basis of the divinely revealed law and the historico-political approach resulting from the study of the state built upon power. The law and the position of the individual as a citizen of a state founded on, and guided and directed by, a law possessing universal validity and absolute authority are two central ideas governing the political conceptions of Medieval Muslim philosophers. Their primary interest, basically, was the individual soul and its perfection rather than the state and its organization. But, since for them, with the exception of Ibn Bāja (Avempace) and Ibn Tufayl, the highest perfection of the individual was possible only in the ideal state, they paid special attention to what form this should take, and who should be its ruler.²

Our discussion of the political thought of Medieval Muslim philosophers will be confined to al-Fārābi because of his dominating position among the latter. Abu Naṣr al-Fārābi was born in Khurasan about 258/870 and died in 339/950 in Damascus. It was he, above all others, who paved the way for, and gave an authoritative beginning to the integration of Greek-Hellenistic philosophy in all its branches with Islam. For al-Fārābi, this was not an exercise in academic speculation

¹ Khalidi. *Classical Arab Islam*, 103; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 3.

² Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "Some Aspects of Islamic Political Thought," *Islamic Culture* vol. 22. no. 1 (January 1948): 6; Lambton. *State and Government*, 316.

but an ambitious program of political reform that aimed at restructuring the political foundations of a religious society. Needless to say, his ideas were to leave a lasting fascination despite the fact that they had no influence on the course of events in the contemporary Islamic state; their impact on the political thought of later jurists, however, was not negligible.¹

Al-Fārābī starts with the necessity of political association. His political thought was concerned with human beings' ultimate goal and the method of achieving this goal. The end of all human endeavours is happiness, according to al-Fārābī who believes that the state is a means by which one can attain happiness and ultimate perfection. In other words human beings need political association, that is in a nation city-state ruled by the philosopher-king, whom he identifies with the lawgiver and the Imam both in order to survive and to strive for perfection.² Moreover human beings cannot provide themselves with the necessities of life or with everything needed for the attainment of perfection, without the help of many others. In *Tahṣīl al-Sa'ādah* he describes the way of life that one must adopt in order to attain perfection, and defines happiness as the highest good sought after for its own sake.³

Interestingly, al-Fārābī tried to demonstrate the affinity and

¹ Ibrahim Madkour, "Al-Fārābī," in M. M. Sharif, ed. and intr. *Muslim Philosophy*, 450; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 103; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 4 and 122.

² This interpretation is contradicted, according to Miriam Galston, by a number of texts. In *Al-Madinah al-Fāḍilah*, al-Fārābī states that human happiness can in principle be attained in every city. The city of excellence is special in that in it the goal pursued by the community as a whole is the means to achieve true happiness. Galston takes another example that in *Fusul al-Muntaẓa'ah* al-Fārābī said that true human happiness can be found in imperfect political communities because some people are born with a natural disposition to achieve the ultimate end of human beings and a hardiness that enables them to realize their potential under adverse circumstances. See Miriam Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Al-Farabi* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 175-175; See Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 124 and 129; Lambton, *State and Government*, 316-317.

³ Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of al-Farabi," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 29 (July 1955), 159-160; Lambton, *State and Government*, 318; Alfarabi. "The Attainment of Happiness," trans. Muhsin Mahdi, in Ralph Lerner & Muhsin Mahdi. eds., with the Collaboration of Ernest L. Fortin, *Medieval Political Philosophy* (The Free Press of Glencoe, Agora Editions, 1963; Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993; Cornell Paperbacks), 78-79; Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Al-Farabi*, 150.

harmony between the divine law of Islam and the practical intentions of classical political philosophy. His concept of happiness is akin to that promised by the prophetic lawgiver. He describes this happiness as an intellectual perfection combined with the moral perfection which precedes it. As a Muslim he was bound to accept the teachings of the *Shari'ah* about God, the angels and reality. However, by drawing on Greek metaphysics, physics and psychology for the explanation of various religious doctrines, he elucidates various statements of the *Shari'ah* and demonstrated that the law (*Shari'ah*) is perfectly correct and true.¹

Beside the similarities between many of the fundamental features of the ideal state of Muslim philosophers, on the one hand, and the good regime envisaged by classical political philosophy in general, and by Plato in the *Laws* in particular, on the other hand,² there are, however, certain clear differences between them. Although the law had a central place in the thought of both, there was a fundamental difference in their conception of the law. Whereas the *Shari'ah* was based on revelation and centered on God, the *nomos* of Plato was based on a myth and revolved around a rational human being. Further, the *Shari'ah* was concerned with twofold happiness: well being in this world and bliss in the next world, whereas Plato's law was designed to enable human beings to reach intellectual perfection in this world and was not concerned with the hereafter.³ Greek political philosophy was also bounded by the geographical as well as cultural horizons of the polis, the classical Greek city state, whereas the horizons of Islam were limited only by the presence of the *Ummah*, a socio-religious rather than a geographical unit.⁴

Al-Fārābī furthermore discusses the qualities of the perfect ruler. He demands the perfection of both his rational faculty or intellect and his imagination, through which, as ruler-philosopher and ruler-prophet respectively, he communicates with the active intellect. Moreover, the imam-king must study the speculative sciences. The long must possess persuasion and imagination, as well as be a philosopher

¹ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 123; Lambton, *State and Government*, 317-318.

² Muhsin Mahdi mentioned several similarities between the two, such as that both begin with a god as the ultimate cause of legislation and consider correct beliefs about divine beings and the world of nature as essential for the constitution of a good political regime. See Lambton, *State and Government*, 317.

³ Lambton, *State and Government*; 317; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 4.

⁴ Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 103-104.

skilled in the speculative sciences. The masses, on the other hand, who serve the state by their arts and crafts, can be taught by means of persuasion and imagination, only. Political leadership is the prerogative of the elite. The Imam-king must also possess unlimited powers and not be subject to any human being, political regime or law. It seems, therefore, that al-Fārābī's conception of the ruler is aristocratic, authoritarian, and elitist.¹

2. The People of *Belles-Lettres*

The second stream in Islamic political thought stemmed from *Adāb* or belles-lettres, where an attempt was made to tap the political wisdom of the ancients especially Persia, for the service of Muslim rulers. The term "mirror of princes" literature, illustrates the extent of and borrowing of adaptability of Islam from the culture of Iran and of Persian literary genre, and is used to describe this body of political thought.²

The existence of an Arabic court literature, drawing its inspiration partly from the Persian Sasanid tradition, had begun even before the advent of the Abbasid Caliphs. The secretaries of the first Abbasids were men who had begun their careers under the Umayyads, mostly as secretaries of the governors in Iraq, such as Abu Ayyub al-Muriyani, chancellor of al-Mansur, and especially the famous translator and adaptor of Persian works, Rozbih ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759). The latter is considered a pioneer in the introduction of Persian literature into Arabic literature in the 8th century C. E. through his translation from the *Pahlavi* (Middle Persian) of the famous *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* (of Indian origin) and other works of an edifying, moralizing nature, and also through his original writings.³

The success of Ibn al-Muqaffa's works gave further stimulus to this direction, and exerted a dominating influence on what is called *Adāb* literature in Arabic. Thus the Sassanian kings of Persia were set up as model rulers, based on Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic translation of Persian "Mirrors of Princes", by Ibn Qutaybah, al-Jāhiz and al-Bayhaqi right

¹ This nature of the ruler ultimately goes back to Plato's views on education and on the three classes, in the *Republic* See Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 129; Lambton, *State and Government* 320.

² Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 105; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 3 and 67.

³ Gibb, "Shu'ubiya," 63; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 68.

down to al-Ghazālī and the Spanish Muslim writer Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi.¹

There are several major themes in this genre of Islamic political thought: justice, the alliance between kingship and religion, and centralization. The ruler is the center of interest and the principal figure of the political scene. His own interest and that of the state are identical, in fact if not in theory. And, although great stress was laid on justice and equity in conformity with the tenets of Islam, they are not conceived as absolute moral values and demands: but rather as politically useful and necessary tools serving the interests of both state and ruler. The writers of "Mirrors" thus base their practical advice on religious and moral principles, even though their advice is not the outcome of a political philosophy, a philosopher's or statesman's theory of government, but is the result of political machinations.²

The *Siyasat-namah* of Nizam al-Mulk belongs to the end of the eleventh century, when all power was firmly held by the sultan and the caliph's authority largely existed in theory only. The new dynasties of the tenth and eleventh centuries, like the Seljuqs, were often feudal and military in structure and spirit. Accordingly, these political manuals devote a great deal of space to a discussion of the relationship between the ruler and his army, emphasizing such questions as the readiness of troops, training exercises, and military strategy. Nizam al-Mulk strongly champions Sunni Islam, and he in particular describes in the last chapters of his *Siyasat-namah* the schismatic rebellions of which he disapproves.³

Nizam al-Mulk was the prime minister (vizier) of the Seljuq sultans. Alp Arslan and his son and successor, Malik Shah.⁴ His actual advice is principally contained in introductory remarks the head of each of the fifty chapters making up the *Siyasat-namah*. His exposition in the Treatise is a mixture of the ideals of the old Persian kings and Islamic

¹ Gibb, "Shu'ubiya." 63; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 68.

² Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 68-69; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 106-107.

³ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 78; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 107; Haroon Khan Sherwani, "Some Precursors of Nizamul'l-Mulk Tusi," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 8 (1934; reprint. 1967): 35-38.

⁴ Nizam al-Mulk or Abu 'Ali Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Ishaq was born at Nuqan, a suburb of Tus, in 1017. He was first appointed a k̄atib (secretary) by Alp Arslan's father, Chagri Beg Dawud. After that Nizam al-Mulk rose step by step till he became Joint-Minister and after the death of Hamid al-Mulk, Chief Minister of the Seljuq realm. See Haroon Khan Sherwani, "The Political Thought of Khwaja Nizamul'l-Mulk Tusi," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 8 (April 1934): 291.

theory. The whole is permeated with Islam, and its specific religious color is much more marked than in the *Qabus-namah* of Kai Ka'us (b. 1021 C E.). Nizam al-Mulk was concerned mainly with the practical duties of sovereigns and seldom referred to the caliph, and his aim was primarily to preserve the stability of the kingdom and the traditional form of society.¹

Nizam al-Mulk's advices focus on the person of the ruler and the qualities which the ruler should possess.² Nizam al-Mulk thought the basis and *raison d'être* of the kingly office is that it precludes the possibility of internal turmoil to a large extent and makes it possible for the subjects to live in peace and security. He said that God selects someone from among humans and gives over to him the charge of the well-being of the world and the comfort and tranquility of human beings after duly furnishing him with the arts of government.³

Justice is the most important quality of all. Nizam al-Mulk makes it quite plain, that the king should be working for the good of his people till the end of his days as the Sovereign. In the same way, he should make his officials treat the people likewise, extract only the legal dues from them, and be ever careful of the affairs of the State.⁴ He insisted on the ruler's duty towards the doctors of the law. The former must bow to their exposition of the law and to their interpretation of the Qur'an and the traditions of Muhammad, until his ignorance is replaced by a sound knowledge of the commandments.⁵

Nizam al-Mulk also considered the need to maintain a network

¹ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 81; Ann K. S. Lambton, "The Persian Theory of Government." *Studia Islamica* vol. 5 (1956): 135-136.

² Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 82; Lambton, "The Persian Theory," 136.

³ Sherwani, "The Political Thought," 296.

⁴ On this point Nizam al-Mulk quoted the story of Darius who was said to have exclaimed just before his last gasp that the carelessness of the King and the dishonesty of the Minister were the real causes for the downfall of his Empire. See Sherwani, "The Political Thought," 296".

⁵ While reviewing the authority of the King, Nizam al-Mulk quoted from the sayings of the saint Sufyan al-Thawri that "the best of kings is he who keeps the company of the learned, and the worst of the learned is he who keeps the company of kings". He also warned the King against basing proclamations on the need of the moment, without knowledge of Islamic law, and on his personal whim. Rather he should issue them after duly consulting with those well-known for their experience, their sound views and their common-sense. See Sherwani, "The Political Thought," 296-297; Cf. Lambton, *State and Government*, 119.

of spies in order to enable the ruler to keep all officers of the state under close observation and control.¹ Related to this topic, he also wrote about foreign representatives. For him, the real objective of foreign ambassadors is not only that they should convey the messages of their governments, but that they should obtain secret information to provide the ambassador's country with the necessary information concerning his country of residence, in case his native country was to fight or invade the other state.²

Nizam al-Mulk marked an epoch in the history of Islamic learning and action, for he was an expert in the arts and sciences of his day. He was also a member of the government and whatever he has written had passed the acid test of experience as well as that of deep historical research. Hence, most of the ideas contained in the *Siyasat-namah* were accepted by his master Malik Shah as the constitutional code of his Empire.³

3. The Jurists

In the early ninth century there were a number of new developments in the political arena due to two processes: first, the emergence of semi-independent or independent dynasties, and second, the steady decline of the military power of the 'Abbasids throughout the ninth century. The former process was an unavoidable result of the need to carve up the 'Abbasid caliphate into provinces for administrative purposes. This new phenomenon consisted in the appearance of leaders such as Ibrahim b. al-Aghlab in Tunisia and Tahir ibn Husayn in Persia, who had such military force at their command that they were virtually independent of Baghdad.⁴ The second process became evident when in 945 C. E. Baghdad was forcibly entered by the armies of a family of warlords, the Buyid or Buwayhid dynasty. During the Buyid (945-1055) and the Seljuq periods (1055-1258), the 'Abbasid caliphs had no political

¹ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 82.

² Sherwani, "The Political Thought," 297-298.

³ Sherwani, "The Political Thought," 295, 299-300.

⁴ The first ruler of the Aghlabid dynasty was given Tunisia as a hereditary governorship just before 800 C.E.. Later the distinguished general Tahir about 821 C. E. began to assert his independence of the caliph, and on his death in 822 al-Mamun recognized Tahir's son as his successor to the governorship. Watt, *Political Thought*, 99; J. J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965; Reprint, 1972). 115 and 118.

power though they retained many ceremonial duties.¹ In short, spiritual and temporal authority were formally separated at the time and the unity of the *Ummah* in political terms could no longer be substantiated.²

The aforementioned development posed problems for the jurists and political theorists. These problems were further exacerbated by the extinction of the 'Abbasid caliphate at the hands of the Mongols in the middle of the thirteenth century. Clearly, the theory had to be modified in order to give doctrinal legitimacy to reality, as well as to demolish the doctrinal position of the (mainly Shi'ah) opposition.³ Therefore, successive jurists sought to reformulate the contemporary political doctrines and, among others, to justify the caliphate as it developed historically.⁴

Al-Māwardi (d. 1058) wrote *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* (Ordinances of Government) as an attempt to assert the authority of the 'Abbasid caliphs against the Buwayhid emirs who were ineffective control of their state. His treatise can be regarded as the theoretical basis for the delimitation of the spheres of authority between the caliph, in charge of religious affairs, and the emir, in effective control of civil administration on the basis of a negotiated agreement.⁵ Accordingly, one

¹ See Watt, *Political Thought* 100; Bannermann, *Islam in Perspective*, 67.

² The granting of the title of '*amir al-'umara*' to Ibn Rā'iq in 324/936 is usually regarded as the formal recognition of the existence of a supreme temporal authority, exercising effective political and military power, and leaving the caliph as the formal head of the state and the faith and representative of the religious unity of Islam. A. K. S. Lambton, "Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government," *Studia Islamica* 5 (1956): 128; Gibb, "An Interpretation of Islamic History," in *Studies on Civilization*, 14; Watt, *Political Thought*, 100.

³ It will be recalled that it was precisely on questions relating to the caliphate that a large part of the early struggles between the Sunnis, Khāwarij and Shi'is centered. And, since the locus of the charges brought against the Sunnis by their opponents, especially the Shi'ah, was that they had erred upon given occasions, as, for example, in recognizing the election of Abu Bakr or in acknowledging Mu'awiyah, the Sunni jurists were inevitably forced into arguments in defence or condonation of the actual historical process. The Sunni scholars obviously could not admit any principle which might lead to the conclusion that the *Jama'ah*, the community in being, had fallen into sin, with the corollary that all its religious and judicial activities were void. Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory," 154; Watt, *Political Thought*, 102.

⁴ Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective*, 67-68; Lambton, "The Persian Theory," 128; Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory," 152-153; Watt, *Political Thought*, 101.

⁵ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 27-28; Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory" 152;

can safely declare that many of al-Mawardi's opinions were dictated by the exigencies of his time and the special circumstances of his life.¹

Al-Māwardi maintained the necessity of the imam are as required by the *Shari'ah* and not by reason. The appointment of an Imam by the consensus of the Muslim community is obligatory. The imamate is filled by election, that is carried out by qualified electors. This elective principle of the imamate is obviously opposed to the Shi'ite claim of bequeathal or divine nomination. The imamate is established by a contract (*'ahd*) between two parties: the imam and the *jama'ah*. To be able to rule efficiently and to defend the faith, the imam must satisfy seven conditions: *'adalah* (justice), *'ilm*, knowledge of tradition; be physically and mentally fit; courage and determination; and be a descendant of the Quraish tribe.²

Al-Māwardi's important contribution to political thought was that he gave a detailed account of the administrative machinery of the Government of his time, and defended the position of the caliph. He considered the caliphate of the contemporary Abbasids as a caliphate in the full sense. The earlier view that the true caliphate had ended with the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-Khulafa' al-Rāshidun*) was henceforth abandoned and replaced by the view that there was only one caliphate stretching from Abu Bakr's caliphate right down to contemporary caliphs, including both 'Umayyads and 'Abbasids.³

Lambton, *State and Government*, 87.

¹ The declining power of the Buwayhids in the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, because of internal conflicts and insurrections in the army and because of Mahmud of Ghaznah's solicitations for the 'Abbasids, made the Caliph al-Qadir and his son al-Qa'im aspire to regain the lost glory of their forefathers. The first step in this direction was the legal definition and exposition of the powers and prerogatives of the Caliph which had well-nigh been forgotten and had fallen into oblivion. See Muhammad Qamaruddin Khan, "Al-Mawardi," in M. M. Sharif ed. and intr., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 719-720.

Khan, "Al-Mawardi," 720-721; Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory," 155-156; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 28-29.

It should be pointed out, however, that al-Mawardi's effort to preserve the position of the caliph was justified by political expediency. Nevertheless, he extended illegal concessions to the contemporary *Amirs* even though he admitted that these concessions were contrary to the principles of the law. He justified these illegalities on two bases: first, that necessity dispenses with stipulations which cannot be fulfilled, and, second, that fear of injury to public interest justifies a relaxation of conditions. Khan, "Al-Mawardi," 730-731; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 111; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 19-20.

Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 C.E.), another of the leading thinkers and theologians of Islam, argued that the caliphate is a permanent necessity. The *imamah* is necessary because it is of advantage and keeps away damage in the world. It is also an indispensable institution of Muslim life demanded by the *ijma'* of the community, after the death of Muhammad, when the maintenance of the religious and political order made the immediate investiture of the imam imperative. He similarly contends that the will of the Prophet was the source of the consensus of the community.¹

Al-Ghazālī's attempt to defend the 'Abbasid caliphate against the rising opposition of the Baunyyah and others who recognized the Fatimid caliphate, made him bestow the 'Abbasid caliph with a legitimacy that he based on *Fiqh*. But, since real contemporary power was exercised by the Seljuq sultan, he was also forced to legitimate the position of the Sultanate in his theory of the Caliphate. In his view, the Caliph, in order to execute the requirements of the *Shari'ah* has to cooperate with the actual holder of power, the Sultan.²

Although Al-Ghazali legalized the function of a government built by brute military force, such as that of the Seljuqs, and urged the community of the faithful to obey even an unjust ruler, he maintained the essentials of the traditional Islamic theory that the source of all

Beside by formulating his political theory on the basis of historical facts and not indulging in empty speculation, it also should be pointed out that Al-Mawardi failed to offer a philosophical conception of the State. He did not discuss the meaning, scope, jurisdiction, and obligations of the State, gave no conception of sovereignty, and was completely ignorant of the idea of a constitutional theory. Thus, lack of this idea not only reduced the value of his work, but also adversely affected the later development of Muslim political thought. See Khan, "Al-Mawardi," 731; Lambton, *State and Government* 84; Gibb, "Al-Mawardi's Theory," 155.

¹ His argument is that the Prophet's purpose was ultimate happiness for his community and that to secure this end both life and livelihood must be protected. Hence the appointment of an Imam is therefore obligatory. Rosenthal, *Political Thought* 39-40; Leonard Binder, "Al-Ghazali," in M. M. Sharif, ed. and intr., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 779.

² Moreover, he maintained that the function of the Sultanate is an essential element of the authorized Caliphate, and that the sultan is the guardian of religion. Al-Ghazālī said that *din* (religion) is the foundation, and sultan is the guardian. By sultan he means earlier "authority, power", and not "the man in power, the ruler". Later he defined the sultan, as the man, in control of affairs who owns allegiance to the imam and grants him his prerogatives. See Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 39 and 43; Binder, "Al-Ghazali," 778-781.

authority in Islam is the *Shari'ah*. In his conception of the Caliphate there are three elements: the Caliph, the Sultan, and the '*ulamā*', each corresponding to some aspect of the authority behind Islamic government, and each performing a function required by that authority. Each of the three parts of the Caliphate also represents one of the major elements of political power in the Sunni community.¹

Badr al-Din ibn Jama'ah (1241-1333 C. E.) follows suit and farther develops, in his treatise devoted to constitutional theory and administrative law, the views previously expressed by al-Ghazālī.² He was also effective in adapting Sunnite political theory to the situation created by the destruction of the 'Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad in 1258.³ He departed from al-Māwardī and earlier jurists, first by including designation of a successor by the reigning imam in the method of election, and second, by recognizing *de jure* usurpation. He actually ruled that if one usurper was overcome and vanquished by another, the first is to be deposed and the second to become imam in his place, "for the reasons of restoring and preserving the unity of the Muslims."⁴

Ibn Taymiyah (b. 1263 C. E.), was among the most vigorous critics of this doctrine. He tried to escape from the vicious circle in which Ibn Jama'ah and his predecessors were caught, by concentrating on the *Shari'ah* and its relevance to the life of the community. Thus, Ibn Taymiyah became renowned for his effort to cleanse Islam, of the accretions of heresy, deviations, and abuses that had stuck to it, and to preach a return to the purity of early doctrine and practice.⁵

In contrast to other Islamic political thinkers, Ibn Taymiyah opined that there is no basis in the Qur'an or the *Sunnah* for the traditional theory of the *Khilafah* or the divine theory of the *Imamah*. Rather, he visualised Islam as a social order where the law of Allah must reign supreme. As a result he was not interested at all in the state and its formation, but simply accepted the state as a religious necessity.

¹ Binder, "Al-Ghazālī," 784-785; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 19-20; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 42.

² Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 43.

³ Watt, *Political Thought*, 107; Gibb, "Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate," in *Studies on the Civilization* 143.

⁴ This doctrine, which amounted in effect to a complete divorce of the imam from the *Shari'ah* and the abandonment of the Law in favor of a secular absolutism, according to Gibb, was an obvious contradiction, which could not be accepted by the general Community of Muslims. Rosenthal, *Political Thought* 44-45; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 23; Gibb, "Sunni Theory," 143.

⁵ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 51-52; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 23.

According to him, any form of government where the authority of the *Shari'ah* reigns supreme, can be accepted as a valid Islamic state.¹

In addition, he rejected the web of juristic arguments regarding the single caliphate. There is no obligation, according to him, whether in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah*, or the *ijma'* of the Companions, upon all Muslims to recognize such a single caliphate as the only valid form of government. Thus, Ibn Taymiyah rejected the theory of political universalism which was so central to Muslim political thinking from the time of al-Ash'ari onwards but which had become by his age a polite fiction—not to mention hypocritical and dangerous. In its place, he proposed a more realistic and viable theory based upon acceptance of the evident geographical and political division of the Muslim world.²

Ibn Taymiyah was also instrumental in changing the center of gravity from the *khalifah* (caliphate) and the *khalifah* to the community (*Ummah*), whose life must be regulated by the divine law. He said that the administration of the affairs of human beings is one of the greatest obligations of religion; and that religion cannot exist without it. His argument rests on two premises: first, the nature of religion (*din*) demands that there must be an organized social order where it may function properly. Second, the institution of the *imarah* (authority, *imamah*) is a religious obligation.³

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 C. E.) was an exception among the jurists or political theorists writing on the state, and has been hailed as one of the first to attempt a scientific study of the state and society. For

¹ According to Qamaruddin Khan, Ibn Taymiyah's contention is not that the Qur'an does not enjoin on the believers to establish an ideological state, but that it gives no fixed constitution of any kind. And although there is no express command to institute the *imamah*, its immediate necessity and obligatoriness are prescribed within the scope of the important Qur'anic injunctions. Consequently, when Muhammad was commanded to establish his prophecy, his commission primarily included the establishment of the *imamah*. Qamaruddin Khan. *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyah* (Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1982), 63.

² In short, he suggested the principle of cooperation, both in the national and international polity of Muslims, and illustrated the necessity of finding a new relationship between the *Ummah* and the *Shari'ah*. Khan, *Ibn Taymiyah* 183-184; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 23-24.

³ The Prophet has ordered his *Ummah* to appoint their administrators to govern their affairs and has ordered the administrators to return the trusts to whom they are due and to adjudicate with justice when they sit in judgment on them. Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 52; Khan, *Ibn Taymiyah*, 29-32; Lambton, *State and Government*, 146-147.

example, he propounded a theory on the power-state which transcended the opinions generally held in the Middle Ages. Moreover, his realistic approach to human beings made him recognize the desire for power and domination as the principal driving force for human action. Together with his impartial sense of observation, this living heritage enabled him to deduce a general law which he applied to the whole of human civilization.¹

For Ibn Khaldun, Islam, in the form of the *khilafah*, is the choicest fruit of a God-guided and God-centered human association. According to him, it is the ideal and the best way to the fulfillment of human destiny and to the attainment of happiness in this world and in the world to come. He was not concerned with the individual believer but with the human group, which he saw as the creator of culture and civilization in the natural and necessary framework of a state built on power and maintained by the force of law and arms under a single sovereign ruler.²

His political theory is part of his description of *'umran*, in the specific sense of "civilization". The close connection between civilization and politics as the art of government is apparent from Ibn Khaldun's terminology; for example, *'umran* is synonymous with *madaniyah* and *hadarah*, settled urban life (as distinct from *badawah*, rural life). *Hadarah* in turn is equivalent to *tamaddun*, to live or become organized in a city (*madinah*) in the sense of the Greek *polis*.³

Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between three kinds of states according to their government and purpose: *siyasah diniyyah*, government based on the divinely revealed law (*Shari'ah*); *siyasah 'aqliyyah*, government based on a law established by human reason; and *siyasah madaniyyah*, government of the ideal state of the philosophers, i. e. the Utopia (*madinah fadilah*) of Plato's Republic.⁴ The state as such is the natural result of human life which requires association (*ijtimā'*) and organization,

¹ Lambton, *State and Government*, 152; Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 84-85; Watt, *Political Thought*, 107. Ibn Khaldun studied the Qur'an and Qur'anic sciences, the traditions, jurisprudence and the political sciences and was thus aware of the different approaches of the jurists and the philosophers to the study of human beings and societies. See Lambton, *State and Government*, 152.

² Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 85-86.

³ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 84; Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, 2d ed., Bollingen Series XLIII, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), lxxvi.

⁴ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 86.

for human organization is a must since "Every human being is a citizen by nature." In other words, associations are indispensable for civilization (*Madaniyyah*) to exist.¹

Ibn Khaldun illustrated the importance of *‘aşabiyah* and economics in politics. He opined that royal authority continues in a particular nation until the force of the group feeling (*‘aşabiyah*) of (that nation) is broken and gone, or until all its group members had ceased to exist. According to him, even religious propaganda needs group feeling.² Meanwhile the significance of economics is shown in his effort to illustrate that for a sovereign to maintain, his independent rule, the absolute monarch must rely on an army which requires considerable sums of money which he must raise through taxation and often through active participation in trade and industry. After a period of expansion and wealth leading to luxury and ease of living, the inevitable decline will set in forcing him to take measures for self-preservation which will inevitably alienate his subjects, harm them in their economic activities, and bring about the ruin, and destruction of his dynasty and eventually of the state itself.³

Ibn Khaldun, like the other Muslim jurists of his time, was concerned with the problem of reconciling the ideal demands of the

¹ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 86.

² *‘Aşabiyah* is a common bond which encompasses both the ties of blood and family tradition instrumental in creating a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility, and the common outlook which shows itself in united action and serves as an important driving force in the formation of states and dynasties. The term *‘aşabiyah* itself was not coined by Ibn Khaldun. As a pre-Islamic word, it was used to indicate a kind of "making common cause with one's agnates", which might lead to "blind support of one's group without regard for the justice of its cause". With the advent of Islam, *‘aşabiyah* and its bad manifestations were strongly condemned and Muslims were called upon to get rid of such backward tribal and group bias. Ibn Khaldun was aware of the Islamic stand against *‘aşabiyah* and tried, for the sake of his theoretical reasoning and later rationalizations, to approach it from another point of view in an effort to explore mutual grounds on which Islamic principles and *‘aşabiyah* can meet. For a thorough discussion of the concept of *‘aşabiyah* see Rabi'. *The Political Theory*, passim, especially 48-69; Lambton. *State and Government*, 167-173; Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 296-199 and 320-327.

³ To Rosenthal's knowledge, Ibn Khaldun was the first medieval thinker to see the importance of economics for politics and for the whole life of any society organized in a state. See Rosenthal. *Political Thought*, 90; Rabi'. *The Political Theory*, 35-37; Lambton, *State and Government*, 175-176.

Shari'ah with the facts of history.¹ The careful reader, Gibb points out, will note how he drives home the lesson, over and over again, that the course of history is what it is because of the infractions of the *Shari'ah* by the sin of pride, the sin of luxury, and the sin of greed.² Even in economic life it is only when the ordinances of the *Shari'ah* are observed that prosperity will follow.³

4. The Political Thought of the Shi'ah

The main doctrine of Shi'ism, namely that the imamate is the foundation of faith, has not changed considerably over the centuries.⁴ The Orthodox Shi'ites (*Ithna 'Ashariyah* or *Imamiyah*) believe that the Imamate had descended from Muhammad, the Prophet, to 'Ali and his eleven descendants. The line of designated Imams came to an abrupt end in 874 C. E., when the Twelfth Imam, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Hasan disappeared. According to Shi'i doctrine, the twelfth Imam went into an occultation which consists of two periods, short (*sughra*) and long (*kubra*). They also believe that at an appropriate time he will return as the Mahdi, the man 'guided' by God to set all things right.⁵

¹ Gibb, "Structure of Religious Thought in Islam," in *Studies on the Civilization*, 173. Rosenthal observes that Ibn Khaldun gives religion (that is, in practice, the *Shari'ah* of Islam) if not the first at least a very important place in the existing state. His inquiry into Islamic history and his experience of the contemporary Muslim states in the Maghreb taught him that there is always a gap between the ideal demands of the ideal *Shari'ah* and political reality. See Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 99 and 92-102.

² Gibb, "Structure of Religious Thought", 173; Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 378-380 and 424-426; Rabi', *The Political Theory*, 94 and 98-99; Lambton *State and Government* 177.

³ Rosenthal, *Political Thought* 92; Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, 426-428; Lambton, *State and Government* 177; Gibb, "Constitutional Organization," 13-14.

⁴ Lambton, *State and Government* 224; 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai. *Shi'ite Islam*, 2d ed., Trans, and ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York. 1977), 186. In explaining the position of the *Imam*, Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth *Imam*, made repeated declarations in unequivocal terms declaring the Imamate to be a covenant between God and human kind, and the recognition of the *Imam* to be the absolute duty of every believer. See S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, 294.

⁵ Syed 'Abid 'Ali 'Abid, MA., "Political Theory of the Shi'ites," in M. M. Sharif, ed. and intr., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 735; Watt, *Political Thought*, 111. Prof. Watt tried to discover the significance of the Lesser and the Greater

The theological and political doctrines of Ithna 'ashari-Shi'ism refused to make legitimate any Muslim government established after the death of the Prophet, except that of the first Imam 'Alī b. 'Alī Talib. The doctrines of Ithna 'ashari-Shi'ism were formulated by three great Shi'i 'ulamā', namely, Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d. 328/939),¹ Ibn Babuyah al-Ṣaduq al-Qummi (d. 381/991), and Muhammad al-Hasan al-Tusi (1067). All these scholars lived under the Buyids and were highly esteemed by the Ithna 'ashari Shi'ah down to the present day. Writing during the occultation of the Hidden Imam the Shi'i jurists did not feel the need which al-Māwardi had felt, to justify the state. Rather, in the absence of the *Imam*, all government, even if the holders of actual power were Shi'is, was regarded by them as unrighteous by the Shi'i 'ulamā'. Thus, they felt no responsibility for the conduct of political affairs or the need, as had al-Ghazālī, to legitimate the power of the temporal government. Rather, they awaited the coming of the Kingdom of God upon earth (the return of Mahdi, the twelfth *Imam*).²

The later Shi'i 'ulamā', Najm al-Din Ja'far bin Yahya (d. 1277) and Hasan ibn 'Alī ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 1325) who lived under the Mongol Ilkhans, added little to the works of earlier writers in the field of political theory. And, even when the Shi'ism of the Ithna 'Ashari-rite became the official religion of the state under the Safavids, the exposition of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699) and others did not

Occupations in actual political terms. See W. Montgomery Watt, "The Significance of the Early Stages of Imami Shi'ism," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 22-30.

¹ Al-Kulayni completed his *al-Kāfi fi 'Ilm al-Din*, the earliest of the Four Books of Ja'fari *fiqh* and an authoritative Shi'i compilation of Hadith comparable to that of *Sahih* of Bukhārī. It contains an exposition of the theory of the Imamate in a special section, the *Kitab al-Hujjah* (the "Book of Proof"), significantly placed in the part dealing with the *Usūl* and immediately following the *Kitab al-Tawhid* (the "Book of Unity of God"). He centered his polemic on the subject of the legitimate and just governance and the authoritative legislation directed against other Islamic schools of law outside as well as within Shi'ism and underlying the discussion of every aspect of jurisprudence. See Joseph Eliash, "The Ithna 'Ashari-Shi'i Juristic Theory of Political and Legal Authority," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 29 (1969): 18.

² Eliash, "Ithna 'Ashari-Shi'i Juristic Theory," 17-19; Ana K. S. Lambton, "A Reconsideration of the Position of the Marja' al-Taqlid and the Religious Institution," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 20 (1964): 115.

materially modify the Shi'i theory of state. Indeed, the religious institution under the Safavids was from the beginning subordinate to the political institution.¹ One must note that the concept of the Imamate, in relation to prophecy, forms the basis of the Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i legal and theological notion that unites the authority of the *Shari'ah* with that of the *Imam*. The living *Imam* is considered to be the living entity of the infallible divine law, its interpreter-maker and executor.² Before the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate had not served juristically to enhance or justify the position of the Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i ruler despite the existence of an Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i sovereign state for more than four centuries in addition to the various earlier Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i regimes. Ithna 'ashari-Shi'ism conceives of no authority exercised by a human being as being divine and no legislation infallible, until the return of the Mahdi.³

¹ Eliash, "Ithna 'Ashari-Shi'i Juristic Theory," 17-19; Lambton, "Marja' al-Taqlid." 115-116.

² Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i jurists came to the conclusion that it was incumbent upon God not to discontinue the mission to humankind after Muhammad's death. They, thus formulated the doctrine of the Imamate as a position occupying the place of prophecy, carrying on its function except in the matter of divine inspiration without a mediator, *wahy*. Eliash, "Ithna 'ashari-Shi'i Juristic Theory." 23.

³ Even in the concept of *Wilayat-i faqih*, the rulership of a *faqih* or juristconsult is believed to be the representative of the Hidden Imam (*na'ib al-imam*). Thus, the position of the *faqih* is temporary that is as the custodian of the community in the absence of the Imam. But, the concept of *Wilayat-i faqih* has been interpreted in various and contending ways over the course of time. See Hamid Enayat, "Iran: Khomeini's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult'," in James P. Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process*, published in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1983). 160-165; Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press. 1995), 169; Shahrugh Akhavi, "Contending Discourses in Shi'i Law on the Doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 29. no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1996): 229-268; Ahmad Mowssavi, "The Theory of Vilayat-i Faqih: Its Origin and Appearance in Shi'ite Juristic Literature." in Mumtaz Ahmad, ed., *State, Politics and Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1406/1986), 97-113.

CHAPTER III

ISLAM AND THE DEMAND FOR PAKISTAN

Islamic political thought in the modern period, is part and parcel of Islamic responses in general toward European domination, and a response toward cultural, political and economic problems facing Muslim societies.¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, many Muslim territories were under direct European control, and much of the Muslim world was dominated by the West. The basis for this European capacity for domination was the transformation of Western society through the processes of modernization.² Nevertheless, it can also be said that Islamic political thought at the turn of the century is still entrenched in previous political theories. These early and medieval theories, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, sought to endow changing realities with doctrinal legitimacy. Consequently, modern Muslim scholars do not seem to have fully accepted the concept of the nation-state and have generally withheld doctrinal recognition and legitimation, although tacitly accepting the reality.³ The results of this interaction between the responses to Western domination and a fidelity and community of the Muslim tradition, was influenced by local conditions, which formed the

¹ During the latter half of the nineteenth century, there emerged a generation of Islamic reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) who sought to unite and strengthen Muslim communities through a reform of Islamic belief, culture and society. They advocated a reinterpretation and reformulation of their Islamic heritage to respond to the political, cultural and scientific challenge of the West and modern life. See John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 3rd ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 46-47; Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 4.

² John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 5 and 84.

³ Muhammad Rashid Ridā (1855-1935) for example, although advocating the ultimate restoration of the universal caliphate and a transnational Islamic community, accepted the reality of the new separate Muslim states, the importance of Muslim unity, and the need to avoid anything which might weaken, that unity and make Muslims even more vulnerable to continued European rule. See Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 64; Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 80.

third dimension of modern Islamic history.¹

There are at least two characteristics of modernity which are related to Islamic political thought: firstly, the emergence of sovereign nation-states as legally defined entities in a global political system, and secondly, secularization and trivialization of religion and the use of the spiritual for profane purposes, as well as the removal of religious concerns from politics and economics. Secularization may be defined as "the process of emancipation of certain areas of social, cultural and political life from the dominance or control of traditional religious ideas; it has been both a contributing factor in modernization and a result of it".² These developments are the main questions faced by Muslims, as reflected in modern Islamic political thought.³ This chapter will deal mainly with the concepts of Islamic state and nationalism as formulated by modern Muslim thinkers; and secondly, it will deal with the origin of Pakistan, the development of Muslim nationalism in India, and the creation of Pakistan.

A. Modern Islamic Political Thought

The following part will deal with the concept of the Islamic state as formulated by Rashid Riḍā, since his model of a modern Islamic state has been adopted by various Islamic movements seeking to establish Islamic states throughout the Muslim world; and the views of 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq who opposed Riḍā's views on the caliphate and repudiated the traditional Islamic religio-political position. The present writer will also discuss the concept of nationalism in both the Arab countries and Iran. He will focus mainly on those thinkers who witnessed the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924, because it was only after the abolition that Muslims started facing severe problems concerning the justification *status quo* with its separate Muslim states and the universal or transnational Islamic community, as well as the place of Islam in the modern national state.

¹ Voll, *Islam*, 5 and 149; Bannerman. *Islam in Perspective*, 77.

² Andrew Rippin, *Muslims; Their religious beliefs and practices* vol. 2: the contemporary period (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 12-13.

³ Cf. Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "Some Reflections on the Separation of Religion and Policies in Modern Islam," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 3 (September 1964): 250-251.

1. The Concept of the Islamic State

The abolition of the Caliphate by the decision of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1924 had one subsidiary, doctrinal result: it introduced the idea of the Islamic state as an alternative to the Caliphate.¹ The founding theoretician of that concept is the Syrian-Egyptian scholar, Muhammad Rashid Riḍā, the spokesman of the *Salafiyah* school of Egypt.² As a direct disciple of 'Abduh, Rashid Riḍā has exercised great influence in shaping the activist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*), the *Jama'at-i-Islami* and others in the Sunni-Muslim world. Riḍā, like his teacher and mentor, 'Abduh, was concerned with the reinterpretation of Islam in light of modern thought.³ Riḍā's political thought and program are summed up in his book *Al-Khilafah wal-Imamat al-'Uẓma* ("The Caliphate or Supreme Imamate") published in Cairo on the eve of the abolition of the Caliphate. His concern was to reassert the temporal as well as religious significance of the true Caliphate and to demonstrate the fitness of the institution for the political requirements of the modern age. Moreover, his thesis provides an instructive starting-point to gauge the degree to which the modern concept of the Islamic state has changed from its earlier spiritual character to its present, totally political nature.⁴

There are three important issues which Riḍā dealt with in the *Khilafah*: (1) Community sovereignty; (2) power, authority and necessity; (3) spiritual and temporal authority. Concerning community sovereignty, he discussed traditional and rational arguments on the obligatory nature of the *khilafah*. He also considered the *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd* (literally: the people with power to bind and to loosen) as the legitimate representatives of the Community, and established an identity between them and the Community as a whole, whether the latter is termed

¹ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Modern Middle East Series, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982; 3rd paperback printing, 1991), 52 and 69.

² See note above.

³ See Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 69-70; Ziauddin Sardar, *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1985), 132-133.

⁴ Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 158; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 70; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 133.

jama'ah or *ummah*.¹ Eventually he argued, along with most traditionalist and modernist Muslim scholars, that once the principle of *shūra*, or consultation between the rulers and the ruled, and the provisions laid down by the jurists on the right to resist injustice are implemented, democracy will be ensured for Muslims.²

In dealing with the issues of power, authority, and necessity, Riḍā, disagreeing with the classical theorists, sets forth his account of the structure of the Caliphate with an entirely different purpose and set of assumptions in mind. Rather, he seeks to provide the basis on which the "true" Caliphate can be restored in the present day. Moreover, he is not concerned with defending the historical record of the various Sunni caliphates after the *Rāshidūn*, and in fact challenges the legitimacy of the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Ottomans.³

There are two Imamates according to Riḍā: the duly constituted Imamate, in which deposition can only be for cause, and the Imamate of necessity. This latter comprises two sub-categories: The first occurs, when it is not feasible to meet all the requirements of the Imamate either with regard to the qualifications of the candidate or to the functions of his office and scope of his jurisdiction, so that an imperfect solution must be voluntarily accepted; and second, when the office or its functions are usurped by force. In the former case the usual rules of deposition only for cause apply; while in the latter, no obedience at all is due and it is a duty to overthrow the ruler at the first opportunity.⁴

Whether power or authority logically precedes the other, Riḍā sought to strike a balance between ignoring the fact of power, or under the guise of necessity, declaring in so many words that might made right, as the classical theory argued. Alas, he did so rather indiscriminately and ineffectively due to his failure to be specific enough in identifying the precise procedures and requirements of the Imamate. In discussing whether those holding *de facto* power are obliged to defer formally to a caliph whose authority is only nominal, he solves the problem by declaring that if in fact they did defer to him, then he would indeed thereby hold real power and would not be only a nominal ruler.⁵

In his discussion of spiritual and temporal authority, Riḍā wrote at length of the political sovereignty of the representatives of the

¹ Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 159-161.

² Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 163; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 77; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 133.

³ Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 168.

⁴ Kerr, *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵ Kerr, *Ibid.*, 171.

Community, the *ahl ḥall wa al-'aqd* whom, he believed, must have the ability to interpret and apply the *Shari'ah* in the spirit of early, pure Islam and in conformity with the requirements of the age.¹ Meanwhile the function of the caliph, as their nominee, is to direct the common affairs of the Community and to serve as the chief interpreter of the law. According to him, the function of the caliph is to protect the Faith and its adherents and to enforce the ordinances of the *Shari'ah*. He is not empowered over the people in religious matters nor has he independent authority to determine the *shar'i* ordinances for them. Rather, his task is only to maintain order and enforce the law. Thus for Riḍā, the caliph's power is civil and subject to consultation, not absolute or exclusive.²

Riḍā further emphasized the importance of the *Shari'ah* as the supreme law of the Islamic state. In his view, Islam has required the caliph to act in accordance with the revealed Law and has forbidden Him to legislate in his own right. Moreover, the *Shari'ah* must be preserved or revived in its proper form, and civic rule (*hukumah madaniyah*) must be enforced with proper legislation in order to survive and function properly. The term he uses for legislations is *ishtira'* which means both the actual law-making and the ability to deduce laws (*istinbat*) from the *Shari'ah*. This last category includes the whole realm of political, administrative, financial, judicial, and military organization. In addition, he stresses that the essence of these rules is their adaptability to meet the exigencies of every time and place, and to fit the religious and political characteristics of every nation. The final criterion, however, against which such laws should be judged remains the *Shari'ah*.³

In sum, one can deduce that the main pivot of the Islamic state,

¹ It will be recalled that this term includes the '*Ulamā'*', which in the present context means the juristconsults or the jurists, who, according to Riḍā, should possess, in addition to a thorough grounding in the traditional sources of the *Shari'ah*, a lively critical mind for independent judgment. What should distinguish them, however, from other experts in the application of the *Shari'ah* is their moderation: they must strike a balance between the Westernized elite and the hidebound, dogmatic, orthodoxy. See Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 80.

² Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 177; Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 69.

³ In this legislation, *ijtihad* (independent legal judgment, effort or ability to deduce roles from sources) is an imperative attribute. It seems that Riḍā understands the *Shari'ah* to mean the divine law which exists in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. See Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 177; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 78-79; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 133-134; Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*, 68.

according to Riḍā, is the *Shari'ah*. The broad ideological orientation of such a state, contrary to what is suggested by the label of Riḍā's own brand of reformed Islam, is not a total return to the origins of Islam but a return to those elements of early Islamic idealism which were untarnished by mundane, ethnic and sectarian prejudices. Furthermore, the political, social and economic affairs of the state should be regulated by a constitution inspired in its general principles by the Qur'an, the Tradition and the historical experience of the *Rāshidūn* caliphs. Moreover, the political leader, Caliph or Imam of the state, Riḍā argued, should be someone who has the capability of performing *ijtihād* in which he would be aided by a Council of Jurists. Indeed, the head of the state must be elected from this Council, modelled after the Electoral Council set up by 'Umar to find his successor, which itself represents all groups of Muslims. The head of the state thus has both political and religious authority and is one of the main spirits behind the legislative process of the country. Moreover, he is the head of all Muslims who are to obey him so long as his decisions conform to the principles of Islam and are in the public interest.¹

Riḍā's model of a modern Islamic state has been adopted by various Islamic movements fighting to establish Islamic states throughout the Muslim world. The Muslim Brotherhood, based in Egypt, Sudan and elsewhere in the Middle East, has taken over the model, with various modifications in its attempt to establish the rule of the *Shari'ah* on earth.² In Iran, the same goal was achieved by a popular

¹ The head of state must have religio-spiritual authority, beside the political one, and the Islamic state must be based on the divine law (the *Shari'ah*) to which the head of state should conform. Riḍā thus states that true obedience is only due to God, and coercive power has been entrusted to the social body of the community. The head of state is only the personification of social unity. He also distinguishes between the caliph's spiritual guidance and the spiritual authority of the Pope. The spiritual authority of the caliph carries no hint of infallibility or the suggestion of spiritual intercession. See Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 81; Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, 184-185; Rosenthal, *National State*, 78-79; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 134.

² During the first decade of its existence, the Muslim Brotherhood concentrated on moral and social reform, attracting popular support for their educational and social welfare projects. In 1933 Hasan al-Banna decided to move the center of activities to Cairo, where he devoted himself to the organization and communication of the Brotherhood's mission and message. The Brotherhood developed into a well-knit religious and political organization with a network of branches that were further divided into secret cells. In its goal to establish

revolution which overthrew the Shah and gave an opportunity to the 'ulamā' to test out their theories.¹

As opposed to Riḍā's theory on the Islamic state, 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq (1888-1966) contested the views of not only the orthodox 'Ulamā' but also modernists like Rashid Riḍā.² In his principal work *Al-Islām wa usūl al-hukm* ("Islam and the Fundamentals of Government") he too made great use of the legal and historical antecedents of the Sunni political theory. In presenting his ideas, 'Abd al-Rāziq too contributed to a new Sunni consensus on the relationship between Islam and the modern state. 'Abd-al-Rāziq's book is based on two premises: first, that the caliphate is not inherent in Islam and therefore not necessary; and second, that the separation between state and religion is based on the

an Islamic state in Egypt, some groups of the Brotherhood turned to violent struggle. However, in the 1980s the Brotherhood in Egypt emerged as a respectable opposition group that had demonstrated its ability to stand up to "pharaoh" without resorting to terrorism. It had established its credentials as a moderate Islamic organization, publicly eschewing violence and working within the political system, from its creation in 1954 the Muslim Brotherhood advocated the establishment of an Islamic political and social order through the adoption of an Islamic constitution based upon the Qur'an and the introduction of Islamic law. In 1977 the Brotherhood advocated the strategy of bringing about gradual change from below, from within the system which included greater involvement in the political process. See Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 133-134, 223-229 and 234-235.

¹ It is noteworthy that in recent years, about half a century after the publication of Rashid Riḍā's treatise, when some Iranian Shi'i leaders—the architects of the Islamic Revolution—produced their initial ideas on an Islamic state as an alternative to submission to tyrannies in anticipation of the return of the hidden Imam, there were strong similarities between their pronouncements and those of their Sunni counterpart: in both, the 'Ulamā' have prime responsibility for leading the popular struggle for establishing the new state; *ijtihād* is the main intellectual means of upholding and reviving the *Shari'ah*; head of state is distinguished more by his jurisprudential and exegetical competence than his political skills; sectarianism is discarded in favour of an irenic, 'unitarian' Islam just as nationalism, is deprecated in the name of universalism; and perhaps most important of all, resisting the cultural offensive of the West is the implied objective of all political, educational and legal reforms. See Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 82-83; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 134.

² Rāziq belonged to an influential family whose members had taken an active part in the Liberal Constitutional Party. He studied at al-Azhar University and went to England to study at Oxford shortly before the outbreak of World War I. He was a religious scholar and a judge in the *Shari'ah* court. See Khadduri *Political Trends*, 215; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 69.

assumption that Islam, like Christianity, is a religion with a universal message. In support of the first premise, 'Abd al-Rāziq argued that the two authoritative sources of Islam—the Qur'an and Traditions—were silent on the matter. Moreover, the consensus of the community (*ijmā'*), the material welfare and religious practices of Muslims give no ground for caliphal authority.¹

As for the second premise which eludes to the separation of religious from civil authority. 'Abd-al-Rāziq argued that the Prophet exercised political power necessitated by the special circumstances of his time; but his action should not be taken to imply that he attempted to found a state or that it was part of his religious mission, a mission which was "prophetic" and not "temporal." He further argued that the caliphate, even that of the first four caliphs, was simply a political phenomenon. And, even though it was established by Abu Bakr on the foundations of a religious call (*da'wah*), the state of the Arabs is *hukumah madaniyah duniyāwiyah*, i.e. a political worldly government, that has nothing to do with religion and that succeeding generations came to believe that a religious significance was attached to this office—a significance which the caliphs found in their interest to encourage.²

'Abd al-Rāziq, however, faced several problems in proving that the Prophet's rule or government was unpolitical. He had to admit that the Prophet's *risalah* or apostleship—so different from the *mulk* of his successors—demanded a certain *quwwah* (force) in order for him to fulfil the divine command (*qawl*) and to see that people followed his call (*da'wah*). The Prophet had also engaged in *jihād*, holy war, in order to make his preaching prevail in the face of Arab and Jewish opposition. 'Abd al-Rāziq stated, nevertheless, that religious propaganda is incompatible with the application of force, and that not a single prophet, he asserted, had recourse to the sword in order to win people over to faith in God. Yet it is an undeniable fact that David, Solomon, and Muhammad, among others, had waged wars against the infidels.³

Enayat believes that 'Abd al-Rāziq's views revolve around two propositions: first, that political authority and government, however indispensable for implementing Islamic ideals, do not belong to the essence of Islam and specifically do not constitute any of its cardinal

¹ Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 216; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 62; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 70; Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 86.

² Khadduri, *Political Trends* 217; Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 92; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 63-65; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 70-71.

³ Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 92-94; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 217-218.

principles. Second, that Islam, if properly understood, leaves the Muslims free to choose whatever form of government they find suitable to ensure their welfare. The opposite belief that in Islam, religion and politics form a unified whole, is wrong so far as it associates politics primarily with the Caliphate, or with the despotic regimes that have ruled the Muslims throughout history.¹ Finally, 'Abd al-Rāziq's view is significant not only within its limited historical context but also because it crystallized many of the issues that modern secularism raises regarding the nature of prophecy and the Prophet Muhammad's mission and, by extension, the meaning and purpose of Muslim life. Moreover, it strikes at beliefs, practices, and institutions that have been integral to mainstream Islam from its earliest period: the religio-political nature of Islam and the fundamental importance of the *Shari'ah* in providing guidance and certitude in social life.²

2. Nationalism

In the history of political thought, the term nationalism sometimes refers to a movement for guarding a nation's independence and freedom in the face of an external aggressor, or to an intellectual assertion of a nation's separateness and identity—or in its extreme form, of superiority over other nations.³ Muslim writers in the nineteenth

¹ Enayat, *Modern Islamic* 64-65; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 217-218; Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 98-99.

² Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 71; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 217-218. Rosenthal has raised a different objection that might be similarly levelled against 'Abd al-Rāziq from an orthodox standpoint. This objection concerns the relationship between state and law in Islam. The Imamate or Caliphate, he asserts, is incomprehensible and meaningless without recognizing the place and function of law in it. According to him, the student of Islam from the time of the caliphate to the modern age is aware that the question of a religious or a lay state depends on the role of the *Shari'ah* in a state created by and for Muslims. The source (divine or human) and the extent of the law of such a state determine its character. Consequently, the law in force makes it a religious or a lay state anyway. Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 89 and 98-102.

³ Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 112. Richard Cottam, in terms of perception and of value, defines that nationalism occurs when a large number of people perceive that they belong to a community that is entitled to and capable of maintaining independent statehood and who grant that community a primary and the primary terminal loyalty. See Richard Cottam, "Nationalism in the Middle East: A Behavioural Approach." in Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, Foreword by Ernest Gellner (Albany: State University of

century, such as Tahtāwi, Nadim, Marsafi, and 'Abduh,¹ understood the term primarily in the first sense, identifying it with the term patriotism, which although signifying a different concept, is related to the territorial aspect of the national identity.²

There were differences between Arab nationalism before and after World War I. Before the War, the Arab idea of nationalism was mingled with the idea of Islamic unity, and Arab nationalism scarcely aimed beyond the rehabilitation of the Arab race in a multinational empire. At the time, Muslim liberal thinkers, to advocate the idea of nationalism, did neither demand that Arab lands be detached from the Ottoman empire nor indeed that religion be separated from the state. The Syrian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawākibi (d. 1902), the most radical Muslim thinker to attack Ottoman rule, called for the restoration of the caliphate from Turkish to Arab hands, but not for a break in Ottoman unity.³ Moreover, he replaced pan-Islamism with pan-Arabism through his concentration on the *Ummah* as founded by the Arabs. The Arabs, he said, with their innate qualities³ such as pride, group solidarity, steadfastness and resilience in the face of physical hardships, should preempt the Caliphate for them. And, like al-Afghani, he wanted, as an orthodox Muslim a thorough reform of Islam to make it impregnable against Western imperialism. According to him the *Ummah* should be contracted to the Arabs. This notion is linked to his definition of the *Ummah* as the sum of the individuals with a common ancestry or *watan*, language or religion, and to his identification of the Arabs with the foundation and expansion of Islam to such an extent that he arrived at a complete identification of the Arab Islamic state with Islam as a religion.⁴

New York Press, 1984). 29.

¹ Rifā'ah Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtāwi (1801-1873), 'Abd Allah' al-Nadim (1844-1896), Husayn al-Marsafi, and 'Abduh were Egyptian thinkers before the collapse of the Ottoman empire. For their ideas on nationalism see Albert Hourani. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 69-83, 130-160, and 193-221.

² Enayat. *Modern Islamic*, 111-112.

³ Even Christian thinkers like Najib 'Azuri who advocated the liberation of the Arabs from Ottoman rule, accepted an attachment to Ottoman unity in some form. They were ready to compromise their extreme nationalist views so as to maintain solidarity with their Muslim compatriots. See Majid Khadduri. *Political Trends in the Arab World*.

⁴ Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 121; Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 56-57.

After the War, however, with the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the gradual withering of the colonial system, Muslim peoples who achieved the status of nationhood began to favour the notion of patriotism, especially certain Arab writers. This marked the beginning of an ideological controversy among the Muslim intellectuals which is still continuing. It centered round the basic contradiction between nationalism as a time-bound set of principles related to the qualities and needs of a particular group of human beings, and Islam as an eternal, universalist message, drawing no distinction between its adherents except on the criterion of their piety. Under the impact of European ideas, Arab nationalism necessarily became liberal and almost secular in character, since it was reacting against the Islamic unity. The controversy over the secularisation of law and court procedure and the debate between "Islamist" and Westernisers about what kind of state and laws Muslims should develop also arouse.¹

Consequently, the goal of Arab unity, embracing as it did large numbers of peoples of diverse characteristics and inhabiting a vast expanse of territories, and the intimate, subliminal association between Arabism (*'urubah*) and Islam, became issues for Arab nationalists after the first World War. Amir Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) was a close friend and associate of Rashid Riḍā who devoted much of his life to the Arab nationalist cause and remained a convinced advocate of the Islamic nature of Arab nationalism. Like Riḍā, Arslan professed primary loyalty to Islam but, following the collapse of the Ottoman empire after World War I, he supported Arab nationalist leaders more strongly than Riḍā, particularly because he was opposed to European occupation of Arab lands. His view of nationalism was, accordingly, negative; and he remained at heart faithful to Islam and saw in nationalism a force which would strengthen Islam against Christian encroachments.²

Sati' al-Huṣri (1880-1964) moved beyond the generalities of Shakib Arslan and addressed in a more specific manner the issues that were generated by the formulations of Arab nationalism, Egyptian nationalism, and pan-Islamism. Although born in the Yemen to Syrian parents from Aleppo, he was brought up in Istanbul and educated more as a Turk than an Arab. His vernacular was Turkish, and he acquired in his youth the characteristic formation of the Young Turk generation,

¹ Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 112; Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 104; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 20.

² Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 181-182; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 72.

based on the ideas of French positivism and European nationalism. He held important posts in the Ottoman Ministry of Education before the collapse of the empire compelled him, like so many others, to choose one or the other side of this complex tradition. In 1919 Ḥuṣri went to Damascus to serve as Minister of Education in Faysal's Arab government and to reorganize its educational system. Moreover, after the downfall of Faysal's kingdom he followed Faysal to Iraq, where he held positions once more in the Ministry of Education, and had much influence on the formation of an Arab consciousness in Iraq.¹

There are three sentiments in Ḥuṣri's view, that create political communities: nationalism, territorial patriotism, and loyalty to the State. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the first characteristic i.e., nationalism had been the most important one and played the most active role in creating patriotism and establishing States. The state, for modern human beings, is the fatherland in which one's fellow nationals live, and the claim of the State to one's loyalty is based on its embodying the will of one's nation. A nation for Ḥuṣri is something that exists apart from human beings who may, or may not, cherish belonging to it. Moreover, any nation must have an objective basis, which can be the language of the state. Therefore, anyone who speaks the Arabic language is, in his eyes, an Arab and belongs to the Arab people. The Arab nation consists of all who speak Arabic as their mother-tongue, no more, no less.²

Second to language, history is the other basic element in nationalism. A common history is important but secondary to language. If a nation forgets its history it loses its feeling and self-consciousness, but it can recover its national consciousness by going back to its history. History can strengthen, but cannot create, the national bond; and it can only strengthen if it is used deliberately to do so. As for religion, Ḥuṣri does not ignore its effect on human sentiments. Indeed, he admits that religion can create a kind of unity in the feelings of individuals: what that effect will be, and how it will be connected with national unity, however, varies from one religion to another. A national religion poses no problem, for it clearly reinforces national feeling; but with a universal religion like Islam or Christianity the matter is more complicated, since it will have the tendency to create universalist and even anti-nationalist

¹ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 312; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 199-200; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 73.

² Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 313; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 201; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 73.

feelings. Therefore, Ḥuṣri advocates a secular type of Arab nationalism, completely divorced from religion. He is firmly committed to the doctrine of separation of religion and politics, and believes that in the modern age religion should be a matter of individual conscience.¹

Some Arab writers try at first to prove that there is no contradiction between Islam and Arab nationalism. But they often end up confirming the Arabic identity of Islam. A typical illustration of this attitude can be found in the views of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzāz (d. 1972), an outstanding exponent of Arab nationalism, and Iraq's Prime Minister in 1965-1966. He starts off by criticizing the misrepresentation of the notion of religion among Arabs under the impact of "cultural imperialism" and the Western usage of the term. Islam, he says, does not admit a narrow view of religion by restricting it within the limits of "worship, specific rituals and spiritual beliefs". Rather, "in its precise meaning, Islam is also a social order, a philosophy of life, (a system) of economic rules, and a government," says Bazzāz. Nevertheless, he extends the role of the Arabs, as the founders of Islam, to that of saviors of the world from oppression and ignorance. Bazzāz has been fully appreciative of the significance of nationalism in modern Arab life and has tried to reconcile Islam, which in his eyes is both a cultural and political force, with nationalism. Nationalism, however, is not a sufficient force without spiritual and moral value, he contends. Consequently, he deduces that Islam is a national religion, and that the real Islam is Arab Islam.²

The religious and ethical values of Islam were so ingrained in Arab society that they could not be ignored even by Arab Christians. A leading Christian Arab nationalist scholar, Qunstantin Zurayq,³ said: "True nationalism can, on no account, contradict true religion." Zurayq

¹ Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 313-315; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 203-204; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 73-74.

² He stresses that the national government he wants to see established does not conflict with Islam, and calls for a pan-Arab organization in Asia and Africa. Islamism and Arabism are like two circles, he maintains. He does not say, however, whether this is intended as an integration or a parallel existence. Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 112-113; Rosenthal, *Modern National* 121; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 185; 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzāz, "Islam and Arab Nationalism." in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam to Transition: Muslim Perspective?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). 84-85; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 308-309.

³ Qunstantin Zurayq is a well-known historian and educator at the American University of Beirut. See Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 184.

often impressed young people with the need of spiritual values and pointed out that there was no inherent conflict between the true spirit of nationalism and religion. Zurayq, however, opposes both Sufism and a petrified "clergy". He saw in the life of the Prophet an Arab hero whose conviction led him to "found the basis of a new civilization," hence his emphasis on the prophet and early Islam. Moreover, he insisted that both religion and nationalism stem from the same source.¹

Another Christian nationalist is Michel Aflāq, the co-founder, with Salah al-Din al-Bitār, of the *Ba'ṭh* (Resurrection) Party in 1940.² In his view there is an unbroken and natural relationship between Islam and Arab. For him, Islam is the vibrant convulsion which shook the forces latent in the Arab *Ummah* and mobilized it in a surge of life which rocked the barriers of tradition and the bonds of convention to reestablish its connection with the profound sense of being. Aflaq regards the message of Islam as the creation of Arab humanity,³ and Islam as the ideal form of existence to believers, since it was revealed originally to the Arabs because their virtues had made them fit to transmit its eternal message.⁴

Aflāq also delved into the notions of nationalism and humanism and their relationship with religion. Religion, and the Islamic religion in particular, is an important element in Arab nationalism as its spiritual manifestation. According to him, Westerners decided to separate nationalism from religion, since religion having entered Europe from without was foreign to its nature and its history. Consequently, religion was a distillation of the creed and morals of the hereafter to them. Whereas Islam, according to him, in relation to the Arabs, is not merely a creed of the hereafter nor is it mere morals, it is of this world, expressing the universal feelings of the Arabs and their view of life. Islam is closely linked with the Arab spirit and it is a symbol of its

¹ Rosenthal, *Modern Natinal*, 121-122; Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 184.

² He was Minister of Education in 1949 and 1956, and had fused his party with the Socialist party of Akram Hourani to form the Arab *Ba'ṭh* Socialist party, now ruling Syria and Iraq. He was expelled from the party in Syria in 1966, but remains in favor with the Iraqi branch. See John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition*, 107.

³ Michel Aflāq, "The Arab Personality Between Past and Present," in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition*, 107-109. It seems that Aflāq's writing was originally a speech given by him in the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad. The original Arabic title of his speech is *Dhikra al-Rasul al-'Arabi* ("In Remembrance of the Arab Prophet").

⁴ Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 197.

identity, and it is even the strongest expression of the unity of the Arab personality. Islam, Aflāq said, over and above that, is the image of their language and literature and the most weighty of Arab national history. Therefore for Christian Arabs, Aflāq argued, Islam is their national culture.¹

Arab nationalism thus starts and ends with the glorification of Arabism as a commanding value in Islam. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned works give the impression that the Prophet Muhammad almost acted as the first hero of Arab nationalism by uniting all the Arabic-speaking inhabitants of the Peninsula under his banner. This view certainly sounds blasphemous to many devout Muslims, Arab or non-Arab, but it bespeaks a sentiment deeply ingrained in the Arab consciousness, however well concealed, or hedged in with the kind of qualifications that would make it palatable to dogmatically severe Muslims. There were, however, diverse reactions toward nationalism. The most outspoken of which were voiced by fundamentalists both inside and outside the Arab world such as al-Banna, Nawab Safavi, Sayyid Qutb, al-Ghazālī and Mawdudi who have taken an unequivocal stand against all varieties of nationalism: linguistic, ethnic or liberal. Other groups have been less consistent, because they have been forced to take account of new political circumstances. This group is represented by the 'Ulamā' of al-Azhar and the Shi'ī leaders and writers of Iran.²

Members of *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* are among the best representatives of the first group. The *Ikhwān* stress the religious and political unity of classical Islam. For them, resistance against foreign domination does not have to be formulated in the language of nationalism: Islam possesses enough ideological and emotional resources to galvanize the masses in the cause of independence. And, even patriotism, is discarded from the lexicon of these leaders, because the only homeland they recognize is not the familiar one associated with specific ethnic groups, but the global *al-waṭan al-Islāmī* (the Islamic

¹ Aflāq, "The Arab Personality Between Past and Present," 111. Another Arab nationalist Christian is Edmond Rabbath, a lawyer and once a member of parliament in Damascus, who began to explain the inescapable association of religion and nationalism, and sought to derive from Islam the same ethical values that were derived from other great religions. Rabbath carried the idea of the religious basis of Arab nationalism a step further by arguing that Islam is in essence a national religion. See Khadduri, *Political Trends*, 184.

² Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 114-116.

homeland).¹ Sayyid Qutb formulated the essence of Islam as a religious way of life applicable to contemporary Muslim society. Sa'id Ramadan, one of the active members of the *Ikhwan* who led the movement outside Egypt and continued its opposition against Gamal Abd al-Nasser's regime, likewise sees in pan-Islamism the truth which only Islam, but not narrow nationalism, can provide. Meanwhile Muhammad al-Ghazali stresses the imperative duty of Muslims to apply the teachings of Islam to political and social life. His views are strongly colored by the uncompromising stand against Western "colonialism" and "imperialism", which he holds responsible for the mistaken separation of religion and politics. Nationalism, according to him, is no less deadly an enemy of Islam than colonialism.²

The initial attitude of the 'Ulamā' of al-Azhar toward nationalism was in accord with that of the fundamentalists. The contemporary rector of al-Azhar, Muhammad Abu al-Faḍl al-Jizāwi, and the *Mufti* of Egypt 'Abd al-Rahman Qurrah, led the attack on the nationalist "heresy" as late as 1928, when Arab nationalists were only starting their campaign across national borders, and the earlier amorphous movements were evolving into more determinate political ideologies and trends such as Wafdism and Kemalism were taking root. In 1938 another eminent religious figure, Shaykh Muhammad Ghunaymi and the Rector al-Azhar, Shaykh Mustafa al-Marāghi, reiterated Islam's opposition to all forms of geographic or ethnic particularism and racialism.³

But in 1952 when the Egyptian monarchy was overthrown by the Free Officers' *coup*, there was transformation of al-Azhar from a champion of Islamic internationalism into the spiritual citadel of Arab nationalism. The reasons behind this conversion were the inability of al-Azhar and the Egyptian 'Ulamā' to compete with the Officer's regime in gaining people's minds and hearts and their submission to the ideology of the new regime. By joining the Arab nationalist movement, al-Azhar not only immunised itself against charges of disloyalty, but also gained a leverage over a leadership which otherwise might have fallen at best, in the hands of secularists and at worse in the hands of communists. Thus, the attitude of al-Azhar brought a complete identification of Islam with

¹ Enayat, *Ibid.*, 115.

² Rosenthal, *Modern National*, 104 and 123; Khadduri, *Political Trends* 87; See also Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 131-143.

³ Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 117.

Arab nationalism as the one we noticed in the case of Bazzāz.¹

The significance of nationalism both as an idea and a movement in Iran's modern history is different from that of Arab nationalism. The prime concern of the political leaders and theoreticians of Arab nationalism during the last two centuries has been to vindicate the essential unity of the Arabic-speaking peoples despite their difference and to arouse them to a sustained struggle for recovering this unity. By contrast, what is called Iranian nationalism, according to Enayat, has been concerned less with the problem of nationhood than with that of freedom. Only marginal references are to be found in the relevant writings of nineteenth-century Iranian intellectuals on such questions as the oneness of the Iranian nation, the constituents of its identity, and the conflict between Iran's pre-Islamic culture and her Islamization. Instead there are persistent demands for democracy, parliamentarism, and the rule of law; criticism of the existing state of affairs; and wistful comparisons of modernization with backwardness. This is simply because, since 1502 at least, Iran had been an independent state, and the unity and identity of her people had been an accomplished fact. Hence, Enayat concludes the Shi'i religious writers scarcely felt the necessity to pronounce their views on nationalism.²

Nevertheless, one must not ignore the fact that increasing threat to Iranian independence and to Islam through the penetration of Western (non-Muslim) colonial powers, the weakness of the Qajar dynasty in the face of Westerners and the domination of the country, gave push to the development of Iranian nationalism in the nineteenth century. This development was strengthened by an attempt to introduce formal constitutional limits on an autocratic and, at times, despotic Qajar government. Under Qajar rule (1794-1925), the relationship of the 'Ulamā' to the government changed as they reappropriated their oppositional role as guardians, protectors, and defenders of Islam rather than as government advisers and administrators.³ The 'Ulamā', then, joined forces with merchants in forming political opposition movements and in political action. They formed particularly strong ties with the latter who looked to cite 'Ulamā', for religious guidance. The 'Ulamā', had also played a major role in, and represented, early nationalist

¹ Enayat, *Ibid.*, 117-119.

² Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 120-121.

³ Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 15; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 83.

movements in Iran.¹

However, following the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Khan in 1925 there was opposition toward nationalism within the 'Ulamā' circles. Reza Khan/Shah's systematic policy of cultural nationalism, and glorification of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization at the expense of Islamic values and symbols, naturally made opposition to nationalism a criterion of doctrinal rectitude.² Among modern religious polemicists against Iranian cultural nationalism, the most influential had been Murtada Mutahhari (d. 1979), Professor of Islamic Philosophy at Tehran University, and one of the leaders of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. He opposed the current official and intellectual belief about the virtues of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization by demonstrating the social injustice and moral depravity of the Sassanian state.³

Against those nationalist writers as well as Western Iranologists who claim that the Islamization of Iran was never genuine because Islam was imposed on her by force, and that it has always been an alien culture for the majority of Iranians, Mutahhari advanced two essential arguments. First, that it is difficult for people who speak of the military conquest of Iran by the Arab armies as being synonymous with the Islamization of the country, to explain why the Persians produced so many great Islamic scholars. It might be thought that a people, Mutahhari said, if forced, would submit outwardly to another pattern of life, but not that a people would be forced to contribute creatively and profoundly to this pattern unless they were transformed inwardly by the new way of life. Second, he argued that if Islam were alien to the Iranians because of having originated outside their geographic borders, then so should Christianity be to the Europeans, Buddhism to the Chinese, and Communism to the Russians. But none of these people have ever expressed a sense of specific cultural alienation towards their religion or ideology. The fact is that Islam, contrary to the contention of Arab nationalists, is not bound by any ethnic predilection; it treats all

¹ For the role of 'ulamā' in nationalist movement in Iran see Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*: 23-59; Esposito, *Islam and Politics*; 83.

² Among Reza Shah's policies which, for his religious opponents, indicated the non-Islamic character of the dynasty are his choice of Pahlavi, the language of pre-Islamic Iran and the adoption of symbols such as the lion and the sun, the re-establishment of Zoroastrianism together with Islam as the state's religions, and the re-naming of streets and public places in honor of pre-Islamic heroes such as Cyrus the Great. See Esposito, *Islam and Politics* 121-122; Akhavi, *Religion and Politics* 37-59.

³ Enayat, *Modern Islamic*, 123.

human individuals as equally capable of grasping its truths, and that the Islamization of Iran, concluded Mutahhari, had taken place gradually over a long period of time.¹

B. Indian Muslims and the Creation of Pakistan

Pakistan is the first state in contemporary history to be created solely in the name of Islam. It was to be a separate home for the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent. But in eyes of most Westerners, Pakistan, whether regarded as an Islamic state or a Muslim state, was an aberration from the norm. The European or American observer instinctively feels that the concept of a nation and a state whose unity depends almost entirely on religion is an anomaly, and a reactionary anomaly. Religion is not now, if ever it was, the basis of nationhood in the rest of the world.² Nevertheless when, on 14 August 1947, Pakistan was established, Muslims were hopeful and ecstatic about the creation of this new state where the *Shari'ah* would reign supreme. In the following passages the present writer will discuss the genesis of Pakistan and the ideas of the pioneer of Indian Muslim modernism, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the theoretician of a separate Muslim state in India, Muhammad Iqbal, and the founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

1. The Conflicting Views about the Origin of Pakistan

In considering the origin of Pakistan there are two opposite views. The first one sees Pakistan as a historical inevitability rooted in the doctrinal differences between Hinduism and Islam. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, for example, argues that from the very beginning the Muslims of India, of both native and foreign origin, were conscious of their separate identity. Hinduism and Islam remained two distinct, irreconcilable, ways of life and the creation of Pakistan was therefore the logical culmination of this irreconcilable clash of values.³ The second

¹ Enayat, *Ibid.*, 123.

² Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 135; Khalid B. Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan; The Nature and Direction of Change* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 1; Keith Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), 194-195.

³ Akmal Hussain, "Pakistan: The Crisis of the State," in Mohammad Asghar Khan, ed., *Islam, Politics and the State: The Pakistan Experience* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985), 195; Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1969; reprint 1979), 3-16; Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The*

one is the view that conceives Pakistan as the result of the political manipulations and conspiracy of the British government to divide and rule. So that the feeling of being a distinct nation came as late as 1940s, when it became clear that the British would soon leave India. Prior to that, the Muslim nobility had little in common with the Muslim peasantry and artisan castes. Muslim professionals and entrepreneurs feared permanent Hindu domination in a united India, and therefore, demanded a separate state where their interests could be safeguarded.¹

It is an established fact that the conflict between Hindus and Muslims had happened long before the emergence of British power in India. Indeed, it was perhaps due to Emperor Aurangzeb's policies (1658-1707) that tension between Hindus and Muslims had increased as a result of his effort to Islamicize the Moghul government. Several Muslim historians have actually glorified Aurangzeb for making Muslims conscious of their separate religious and ideological identity. But it has also been argued that Muslims' separatism really started after the British conceded separate electorates to Muslims in 1909. This decision has often been described as a deliberate attempt on the part of the British to divide the electorate and thus disrupt the growing Indian Nationalist movement.² However, the British had defended their decision by maintaining that the allegation that separate electorates had created a new political gulf between Hindus and Muslims, was no more than a recognition of the cultural and religious differences that had already existed between Hindus and Muslims.³

Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan (London: Frances Pinter, 1987), 66.

¹ Hussain, "Pakistan," 195; Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 66.

² Mahatma Gandhi in the second session of the Round Table Conference in London in 1931 said that the quarrel between Hindus and Muslims was coeval with the British advent in India. However, it is difficult to indicate such a position historically. See Khalid B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, 2d. ed., with a foreword by George Cunningham (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1968; Oxford Pakistan Paperbacks, 1992), 3.

³ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 3-4; Cf. Hussain, "Pakistan," 195-196. Prior to 1909 two books were representative of the Muslim and Hindu ways of thinking: Altaf Husain Hali's *Musaddas* (The Ebb and Flow of Islam, 1879) and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* (The Abbey of Bliss, 1882). Hali appealed to Indian Muslims to discard their ignorance, indolence, and selfishness and forge ahead as a disciplined, industrious and united nation. While *Anandamath*, portraying the rise of Hindu nationalism during the decline of Muslim power in Bengal, sounded a clarion call to Hindus to arise from their languor and take

The Hindu-Muslim conflict was further heightened when the British policy of transferring more and more power to Indian hands had generated economic repercussions as well. Muslims and Hindus not only competed against each other for Government posts but also for jobs and opportunities created in the wake of the industrialization and urbanization of India. Thus Muslim middle-classes, lagging behind the other Indian communities in this competitive struggle, found the idea of Pakistan extremely attractive because it would mean that Muslim banks, Muslim industries, and Muslim commercial houses would be established in Muslim Pakistan with the fear of Hindu competition removed permanently from their state.¹

But Pakistan came into being not only because the Muslims in India were intensely conscious of their national and cultural identity, but also because the Hindu community in India was intolerant and exclusive, at the time. Just as Caste Hindus have maintained caste segregation against Hindu inferior castes, the Hindu community, dominated by Brahmins, had also regarded Muslims, who ate beef and brought with them an alien culture as *Melechas* (unclean).² Even Jawaharlal Nehru had admitted that many a Congressman was a communalist under a national cloak. It was Sardar Patel who had been communal-minded from the beginning and later, as a result of the obstructive attitude of the Muslim League in the Interim Government, became convinced that Muslims and Hindus were separate nations and that partition was the only solution.³

While the Congress was formally a secular organization, in practice, its campaigns and political language were characterized by Hindu symbolism. This most apparent during the 1905-11 campaign against the partition of Bengal, when the Congress could have won the support of most Muslim landlords, because few Muslims supported the division of Bengal, but failed to mobilize the support of Muslims. Moreover, the suspicion among Muslims that the Congress had a Hindu communal orientation was given further weight by the fact that *Bande Mataram*, a patriotic hymn expressed in Hindu images, was declared the

up arms against the degenerate and oppressive Muslim rule. Hindu leaders in the novel made it clear that their struggle was not against the British, who had really come to India as liberators, but against Muslim tyranny and misrule. Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 4-5.

¹ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 7; Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 66; Hussain, "Pakistan," 197.

² See Qureshi, *The Struggle*, 4-5.

³ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 8-9; Hussain, "Pakistan," 198.

national anthem. The Congress stand on the language issue also incensed many Muslim intellectuals, especially when Hindi was made compulsory in schools and the Congress refused to introduce the Urdu language and Arabic and Persian literature to regions where the traditional Muslim community regarded these as the basis of Muslim education.¹

At this stage it is worth considering Leonard Binder's assessment. He believes that Pakistan came into being as a result of the increasing democratization and Indianization of the government of India in the face of the peculiar geographic distribution of the Muslim population, its cohesiveness, and its fear of Hindu domination. According to him, the cohesiveness of any society is partly a function of external factors. In the case of the creation of Pakistan, the exclusiveness of Hindu society, its caste system, and its rapid adjustment to British rule were perhaps more important than any theoretical inner unity. Moreover, the gradual devolution of imperial power to the developing Indian democracy, wherein the numerical superiority of the Hindus was approximately three to one, gave rise to a not unnatural apprehension regarding the status of Muslims and Islam in an Indian nation-state.²

Each factor mentioned above had perhaps contributed its share, and consequently Pakistan was born through a multiplicity of factors. Various views differ in emphasizing which factor is dominant in the foundation of Pakistan. But perhaps a dominant or decisive cause for the creation of Pakistan, according to Sayeed, is that there has never taken place a confluence of the two civilizations in India—the Hindu and the Muslim. They may have followed a winding course towards each other here and there, but on the whole the two have flowed their separate courses—sometimes parallel and sometimes contrary to one another.³

2. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Muslim Political Separatism

No account of the creation of Pakistan could be considered complete without accounting for the contributions of Sayyid Ahmad

¹ Hussain, "Pakistan," 199 and 206; Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 23 and 88.

² Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, The Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 3-4.

³ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 11-12.

Khan. He came of an aristocratic family of Mughal Delhi, and was born in 1817 and took service under the British in 1837, rising to the rank of Subordinate Judge. He remained loyal in the Mutiny (1857) and published an essay on its causes. He visited England in 1869, and retired in 1875. In 1878 he became a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council and was knighted in 1898. From 1859 until his death in 1898 he came to be more and more preoccupied with the problems of Muslim education in India, and at the time of his death he was acknowledged as the grand savior of Indian Islam.¹

The shattering experience of the Mutiny of 1857 brought Sayyid Ahmad Khan to be convinced that the Indian Muslim community must come to terms with the West, both politically and culturally. Since for him, "the first priority was the successful transcendence by the community of its immediate difficulties so that it might recover strength and well-being,"² he argued that education is essential for the community's progress. He, therefore, devoted himself to the promotion of English education among the Muslims, and in 1875 laid the foundation of the Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College at Aligarh which soon became the famed Muslim University.³

The college, which was aimed at the liberalization of ideas, broad humanism, a scientific worldview, and a pragmatic approach to politics, had significant repercussions on the idea of a separate Muslim nation in India. By striving for a steady increase of educated Muslims in the government services, and smoothing the transition of the younger generation of Muslim elite from almost medieval conservatism to at least superficial modernism, it, finally, was to produce the leadership for Muslim political separatism in India as a counter-balance to the growing influence of the Indian National Congress.⁴ Khwaja Altaf Husayn Hali, Chiragh 'Ali, Shibli Nu'mani and Mawlana Muhammad 'Ali were Sayyid Ahmad Khan's associates and followers. They were mainly responsible for making Muslims' conscious of their separate national and cultural identity.⁵ Sir Sayyid's movement influenced the Urdu literature

¹ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*. (London, Bombay, and Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 31-32; Sheila McDonough, *The Authority of the Past: A Study of the Three Muslim Modernists* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1970), 4-5.

² McDonough, *The Authority of the Past*, 7.

³ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 36-38.

⁴ Ahmad, *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 11; Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 129-132; Aziz Ahmad and G.

profoundly, and Hali's book, *Musaddas*, marks the rise of the political poem in Urdu, and also had an indirect influence on Iqbal.¹

Although Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not anti-Hindu, but he became suspicious about Hindu intentions after 1867 when they started campaigning in Benares for the substitution of Hindi with its Devanagri script for Urdu with its Persian script as a court language. His reasoning to oppose the Congress was that the Congress objective of representative government meant that Muslims would be swamped by the Hindu majority.² In 1887 when a Muslim, Badr al-din Tayyibji, was elected as its president, he became vehement in his opposition to Muslims joining the Congress, because he feared that the logical outcome of Congress agitation would be violence in which Muslims, as in the Mutiny, would bear the brunt of the consequences. From Sayyid Ahmad's viewpoint this was the beginning of an erosion in Muslim political solidarity and disastrous for the future of the Muslim community. It was numerically much smaller than the Hindu population, educationally backward, politically immature, and in economic resources and enterprise far behind the others. A political alliance with the Hindus could therefore lead only to one inevitable result, the eventual domination and the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger.³

However, the reasoning that Sir Sayyid used against wholesale extension of representative government to India was prophetic. He also pointed out that majority government was possible only where voters belonged to a homogeneous nation. Where they were not, according to

E. von Grunebaum, eds., *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968*. Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), 49, 89, 95, and 112.

¹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan's movement influenced the Urdu literature profoundly, which soon became a powerful instrument of religio-political propaganda. The Muslims of the Punjab were taking to Urdu under the influence of the Aligarh movement. Lahore was vibrating with new intellectual trends, and Urdu poetical symposia were in vogue, and Hali (a pillar of the Aligarh movement), and Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad were the shining literary stars. The cultural life of Sialkot, where Iqbal spent his childhood, echoed the trends prevailing in Lahore, See Ahmad and Grunebaum, eds., *Muslim Self-Statement*, 95; Hafeez Malik & Lynda P. Malik, "The Life of the Poet-Philosopher", in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal; Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), 6.

² Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 18.

³ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 34; Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 18.

him as in the case of India which was continent and not a country, this would spell nothing but disaster to the Muslim minority. It may also be noted that Sir Sayyid before the close of the nineteenth century was advancing the same views that came to be associated with Jinnah in his advocacy of Pakistan and the two-nation theory after 1940.¹

Iqbal and the Muslim Nationalism

Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the East, is widely considered to be the man who conceived the idea of Pakistan. Although he started as an Indian nationalist who sang praise for his homeland,² it was in his mind that the idea of Pakistan as a separate Muslim State was first generated. And, even though the poet died nine years before Pakistan was founded, he had called for "Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State" as early as 1930. "The construction," he said, "of a polity on Indian national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim."³

Iqbal's theory of Islamic Nationalism and a separate Muslim state in India is reflected in both his writings and poems. Through understanding Iqbal's major views with regard to the function of poetry, theory of knowledge, theology, philosophical anthropology James B. Prior uncovered Iqbal's vision about an Islamic community or nation. It

¹ Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 18-19.

² Iqbal's pre-1905 poetry is often described as nationalistic. However, Riffat Hassan notes that it is necessary to differentiate between patriotic and nationalistic verses because, according to her, the latter implies an awareness of, and an involvement with, political theory or practice which may be entirely absent from the former. Thus, *Himala*, the first poem in *Bang-i-Dara* and a hymn of the magnificence and grandeur of the tallest mountain range in the world, according to Hassan, is patriotic, not nationalistic. See Riffat Hassan, "The Development of Political Philosophy," in Malik, ed., *Iqbal*, 137.

³ H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 59; C. M. Naim, ed., *Iqbal, Jinnah, and Pakistan: The Vision and the Reality*, Foreign and Comparative Studies/South Asian Series. No. 5 (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1979), 195-196; Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), 33-34; Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 273; Ahmad and Grunebaum, eds., "The Concept of a Separate Muslim State in the Subcontinent," in *Muslim Self-Statement*, 148 and 150.

appears that Iqbal condemned "fatherland-worshipping", especially in the United States where the cult of patriotism encourages human sacrifice as its most sacred rite. He saw that danger in a narrowly-conceived form of nationalism, which was defined only by geography and politics, could be very dangerous.¹

Iqbal found a firmer basis for his nation in the principle of obedience to God. The cornerstone of nationhood is unity of a group of people, and this unity must first of all be a common affirmation of faith, of common purpose, he declared:

the heart dies of hatred, lives of faith.
The power of faith derives from unity;
when unity becomes viable, it is a nation.²

The vision of *tawhid*, the Unity of God is a second prerequisite of unity. When Muslims stand together, their unity as a community manifests the Unity of God:

Do not look slightingly on oneness of vision:
this is a true epiphany of the Unity.
When a nation becomes drunk with the Unity
power, yea, omnipotence lies in its grasp³

In other words, political unity is essential for the unity of religious faith. Spiritual purity is dependent, apparently, on political purity. That, according to Prior, is why Iqbal advocated a separate Muslim state in India, since an Islamic nation is an essential part of faith for a Muslim. The implication is clear: not only is the West a threat to Islam, but the myriad of divisive forces inside the Indian Subcontinent are an inherent threat to Islam. The Muslims of India must, therefore, band together—or perish.⁴

Accordingly, Iqbal believed that a separate Muslim state is a

¹ James B. Prior, "Iqbal's View of Islamic Nationalism in *Javid Nama*." in M. Saeed Sheikh, ed., *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and Art (Select Articles from the Quarterly 'Iqbal')* (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbal, 1972). 383, 412, and 421.

² Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes by Arthur J. Arberry (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1956). 129; Prior, "Iqbal's View," 428.

³ Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, 139; Prior, "Iqbal's View." 428.

⁴ Prior, "Iqbal's View," 422, 428, and 429.

solution for Muslims in the slowly-emerging pattern of self-government in India. His understanding of the Islamic state as a community whose membership is based on common religious belief and whose purpose is to realize freedom, equality, and brotherhood in history led quite logically to his rejection of territorial or local nationalism as contrary to the universal brotherhood established by Muhammad:

Our Master, fleeing from his fatherland.
Resolved the knot of Muslim nationhood.
His wisdom founded one Community
The world its parish—on the sacred charge to civilize.¹

Iqbal's rejection of any understanding of the nation-state as a foundation of the Islamic community also implied the rejection of the modern Western concept of the duality of church and state. "In Islam," he holds, "it is the same reality which appears as the Church looked at from one point of view and the State from another. It is not true to say that the Church and the State are two sides or facets of the same thing. Islam is a single unanalysable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies."² He further maintains that "The Islamic idea of the State must not be confounded with the European idea of the separation of Church and State. The former is only a division of function as is clear from the gradual creation in the Muslim State of the office Shaikh-ul-Islam and Ministers; the latter is based on the metaphysical dualism of spirit and matter."³

In Iqbal's view the ideological State, being an Islamic State, affords equal opportunities to people to make as much as their potentialities permit. In such a State, every member is to be encouraged to display the best in him/her in the service of God and humanity. An

¹ Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness: A Philosophical Poem*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, with Introduction and Notes (London: John Murray, 1953), 30; John L. Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic State," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 182. The real significance of the Prophet's *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina in 622 lay in the repudiation of the concept of local patriotism. Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 156-157.

² Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968), 154.

³ Syed Abdul Wahid, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), 284; quoted in Hafiz Abādullah Farooqi, "Iqbal's Concept of State," in M. Saeed Sheikh, ed., 373.

Islamic State, according to Iqbal, exists for the perfection of the world-order and for the raising of humanity to a higher, nobler, and more spiritual life, and is thus to be distinguished from a national State, which is narrow and secular in its outlook. Iqbal says that "the state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform ... ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. It is in this sense alone that the state in Islam is a theocracy, not in the sense that it is headed by a representative of God on earth who can always screen his despotic will behind his supposed infallibility. The critics of Islam have lost sight of this important consideration."¹

Iqbal thus rejects nationalism in the secular sense; yet is an advocate of Islamic nationalism which he bases primarily on the principle of the unity of God, and hence cherishes the vision of a World State in which all Muslim nations would form an indivisible community. Nationalism in this sense has its place in an Islamic ideological State.² The inner cohesion of this community issues not from geographic or ethnic unity, but from the unity of its political and religious ideals. Membership or citizenship is based upon a declaration of "like-mindedness" which terminates only when this condition has ceased to exist.³ Iqbal further elucidates this point as follows: "The political ideal of Islam consists in the creation of a people born of a free fusion of all races and nationalities. Nationality, with Islam, is not the highest limit of political development; for the general principles of the law of Islam rest on human nature, not on the peculiarities of a particular people."⁴

Iqbal sees Islam and modern territorial nationalism as rival principles for organizing the ultimate political group. Nationalism brings people together, but it also divides them and keeps them divided, for its criteria of solidarity among human beings—race, language, and territory—cannot readily be met by the outsider. In its identification with secularism, it makes religion a private affair, consigning it to the individual's relationship with God. Furthermore it makes coercive power the ultimate author and arbiter of morals.⁵ Iqbal said:

¹ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 147.

² Farooqi, "Iqbal's Concept of State," 374.

³ Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal," 133.

⁴ Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections*, 60; quoted in Farooqi. "Iqbal's Concept of State." 374.

⁵ Anwar Hussain Syed, *Pakistan: Islam, Politics, and National Solidarity* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 44.

“If you begin with the conception of religion as complete otherworldliness, then what has happened to Christianity in Europe is perfectly natural. The universal ethics of Jesus is displaced by nationalist systems of ethics and policy. The conclusion to which Europe is consequently driven is that religion is a private affair of the individual, and has nothing to do with what is called man’s temporal life. Islam does not bifurcate the unity of man into an irreconcilable duality of spirit and matter. In Islam God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state are organic to each other.”¹

Territorily, according to Iqbal, the Islamic polity is transnational, embracing the whole earth. In *Rumuz-e Bekhudi*, for example, he states the case for international Islam. At the time he was still thinking of the possibility of a revived caliphate, bringing together in a single theocracy all the Muslims of the world.² Later, however, he came to realize that the exigencies of his time necessitated adaptation and patience. In a similar vein, Iqbal accepted the Mu’tazilite view that the caliphate, far from being divine or indispensable, should be judged pragmatically. “For the present” he wrote, “every Muslim nation must sink into her own deeper self, temporarily focus her vision on herself alone, until all are strong and powerful to form a living family of republics. A true and living unity, according to the nationalist thinkers, is not so easy as to be achieved by a merely symbolical overlordship. It is truly manifested in a multiplicity of free independent units whose racial rivalries are adjusted and harmonized by the unifying bond of a common spiritual aspiration. It seems to me that God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, “Presidential Address at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad on the 29th December, 1930,” in Naim, ed., 192; Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 156.

² See for example his poems which Arberry named as “That since the Muhammadan Community is Founded upon Belief in One God and Apostleship, therefore it is not Bounded by Space.” See Iqbal, *The Mysteries*, 29-31; Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections* 60; quoted in Farooqi, “Iqbal’s Concept” 374; Esposito, “Muhammad Iqbal.” 183.

members.”¹

For Iqbal, Islam is more of a principle of social action than as a way of securing eternal bliss in the hereafter. Islam gives Indian Muslims solidarity which is the basis of their group cohesion. The “organic wholeness of a unified will” is necessary for taking communalism seemed to be absolutely necessary for Muslims to preserve their identity and way of life: “the Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian Homelands.” Iqbal loved his communal group as a living operative factor in his present consciousness. But he distinguished this from a narrow communalism which deprecated other communities and their customs. Rather, his communalism entertains the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institutions of other communities.²

4. Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Foundation of Pakistan

There is a popular view which regards Pakistan as no more than a personal triumph of the brilliant strategy and will-power of Quaid-i-Azam (Great Leader) Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Some have been even gone so far as to suggest that had Jinnah died earlier, there would not have been a Pakistan. This view, however, is not true, although it is true that Jinnah’s great role was a highly important contributory factor. He was indeed the one to take Iqbal’s embryonic vision to its logical conclusion, and it was his genius, commitment and sheer hard work that ensured the creation of a homeland for the Muslims of India.³

In his early political life, Jinnah, like Iqbal, was an Indian nationalist. But when Jinnah finally gave up his “All India” dream of a free united India he, unlike Iqbal, became concerned with the political power of the Muslim Community, not with the community’s religion or its religious philosophy. While Iqbal was deeply concerned with the

¹ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, 157-159; Iqbal, *The Mysteries*, xii; Esposito, “Muhammad Iqbal,” 183; Syed, *Pakistan*, 44.

² Iqbal. “Presidential Address,” 194-195; Muhammad Iqbal, “The Concept of a Separate Muslim State in the Subcontinent,” 149; Syed, *Pakistan*, 46; Esposito, “Muhammad Iqbal,” 184.

³ It is often said that Iqbal is the visionary, Jinnah is the technician, and Pakistan is the reality. See Fazlur Rahman. “Iqbal, the Visionary; Jinnah, the Technician and Pakistan, the Reality.” in *Iqbal, Jinnah and Pakistan*, 1-9.; Sayeed, *Pakistan*, 11; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 135.

religious solidarity of Muslims and hence condemned Qadianism as a divisive element on the issue of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, Jinnah does not seem to have been perturbed by this issue. Therefore it is not surprising that while he managed to secure the support of many influential 'ulama' and *tariqah*'s leaders, assuring them that the *Shari'ah* would be observed by the Muslim state,¹ he, on the other hand, declared several times that Pakistan would not be a theocratic state but a modern and secular democracy. This premise was made when he addressed the members of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, three days before independence in which he committed openly to secularism.²

For many people the speech contradicted the whole rationale of Pakistan. Muslim nationalism was based on religion and Jinnah and all other Muslim League leaders had used Islam in their legitimation of the demand for a separate state.³ Indeed, one of landmarks in Jinnah's political career was his formulation of 'Fourteen Points' summing up the reaction of the All-India Muslim Conference to the report of the committee appointed by the Indian National Congress to recommend the principles of a constitution for India. Jinnah's Fourteen Points demanded a federal system which complete autonomy and residuary powers vested in the provinces; separate electoral bodies and weightage for the Muslims; and safeguards for the protection and promotion of Muslim education, language, religion, personal laws and *waqfs*.⁴

Moreover, it was Jinnah who had elaborated the "Two-Nation Theory", first formulated by Iqbal, in 1940 in an article in *Time and Tide*. He began his argument, by quoting from the report of the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms set up by the British Government, that India is inhabited by many races often as distinct from one another in origin, tradition and manner of life as are nations of Europe. "Hinduism and Islam", continued Jinnah, "represent two distinct and separate civilizations and, moreover, are as distinct from

¹ In a letter to Pir Sahib Manki Sharif, a powerful *pir* of the Frontier region, Jinnah wrote: 'It is needless to emphasize that the Constituent Assembly which would be predominantly Muslim in its composition would be able to enact laws for Muslims, not inconsistent with the *Shari'ah* laws and the Muslims will no longer be obliged to abide by un-Islamic laws.' Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 78.

² Saleem M. M. Qureshi, "Iqbal and Jinnah: Personalities, Perceptions and Politics," in Naim, ed., 20.

³ Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 79; Sardar, *Islamic Futures*, 136.

⁴ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 164-165.

one another in origin, tradition, and manner of life as are nations of Europe.”¹

Jinnah’s best well-known statement of the two-nation theory was made during his presidential address at the annual meeting of the Muslim League in March 1940, where a resolution demanding independent Muslim states in the subcontinent was adopted. According to him, the problem in India is not one of an inter-communal character but manifestly of an international one, and must be treated as such. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. The Muslims, he said, would not accept an Indian polity in which a permanent Hindu majority—often hostile to their cultural personality—predominated. Beyond that, they wished to develop their spiritual, cultural, economic, and political life according to their own “genius” and their own ideals. Jinnah, therefore, exhorted his listeners at Lahore to “come forward as servants of Islam” and to organize the Muslim masses for the attainment of these goals.²

After Pakistan had been established it seemed that the idea of Muslim nationalism, and the two-nation theory would yield to a Pakistani nationhood to which not only Muslims, but Pakistani Hindus and other non-Muslims might belong.³ Syed argues that it would seem that at the time of his address to the Constituent Assembly, Jinnah regarded this as a desirable development. But it appears also that his mind was not entirely made up. Ahmed opined that by saying that Hindus had equal rights as citizens and religion had nothing to do with the business of the state was a radical position to take after all that had been said, and was being said, about Islam and its connection with Pakistan. It could even be said that Jinnah’s discourse on a secular state was hardly consistent with the logic of Pakistan. It is possible, however, to argue that what Jinnah was suggesting was the replacement of the idea of a Muslim nation with a territorial concept: the notion of a

¹ Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism*, 155-166; see also Anwar H. Syed, “Iqbal and Jinnah on Issues of Nationhood and Nationalism,” in Naim, ed., 91; Qureshi, “Iqbal and Jinnah”, 31-32.

² Syed, *Pakistan*, 51-52; Manzooruddin Ahmed, “Iqbal and Jinnah on the Two-Nations’ Theory,” in Naim, ed., 41, 64-65.

³ Jinnah’s presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, on August 11, 1947 stated, among others: “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state.” M. A. Jinnah. “Inaugural Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August, 1947, in His Capacity as Its First President.” in Naim, ed., *Iqbal, Jinnah and Pakistan*, 213; Syed, *Pakistan*, 53-54.

territorially-defined nation, i.e. a Pakistani nation including all people and religious communities living in Pakistan. In that case, Pakistan was to be a Muslim state only in an arithmetical sense—as the numerical majority.¹

Pakistan meant different things to different people, it is thus a matter of consequence that after its establishment the various expectations generated considerable ideological debates. No one had the remotest idea what followed afterwards. Since Pakistan was a confessional state, the government, on the one hand, was under pressure from the '*ulamā*' and other doctrinally-minded Muslims to give some tangible form to the state's professed "Islamic way of life", including the composition of an Islamic constitution. The Western-oriented elites, on the other hand, have been evasive, probably because of their concern that their own title to rule would be dubious in an Islamic state.

As a result there were conflicting theories of the nature or character of an Islamic state. In this context Muhammad Asad's work on the principles of state and government in Islam has a significant relevance.²

CHAPTER IV

MUHAMMAD ASAD ON STATE AND GOVERNMENT IN ISLAM

After the establishment of Pakistan, the leadership of the newly born Muslim state under Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League Party turned its attention to the task of nation-building. Five issues dominated the political field in the first year of Pakistan's existence, they were: the war in Kashmir, the refugee problem, "provincialism," the

¹ Syed, *Pakistan*, 54; Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 79. Meanwhile Naib argues that a careful analysis of the same speech and Jinnah's other utterances before and after partition convinces him that Jinnah had no objection to the state based on the broad principles of Islam. Naib concludes the speech was made at a time when the whole Indian sub-continent was swayed with communal frenzy, in which millions of people were victims of communal riots. Jinnah was stressing the necessity for the communal harmony and peace for the progress of the new nation. See Raja Mohammed Naib, "Islamic Political Thought: The Case of Pakistan" (Ph. D. diss., The University of Kansas, 1963), 157-158.

² Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 80-81; Binder, *Religion and Politics*, ix and 117.

status of religious minorities, and the Islamic character of the state.¹ In this chapter we will discuss Muhammad Asad's views on state and government in Islam which were originally published in March 1948 in the form of an essay entitled *Islamic Constitution-Making*. This essay was a response and contribution to the issue of the Islamic character of Pakistan.² Later in 1961, the University of California Press published Asad's *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* which represents a development of the ideas first set forth in the essay.³

A. Muhammad Asad's Position on the Islamic Character of Pakistan

Scholars drew different categories for all those who participated in the debates surrounding the character of the state, particularly those who wanted to give Pakistan a distinctly Islamic character that is fully attuned to the exigencies of the present age. Leonard Binder, for instance, identifies four important points of view regarding the constituent process in Pakistan, namely, a traditional view, a modernist view, a fundamentalist approach, and a secularist orientation. Generally speaking, these points of view, according to him, are adhered to by four loosely organized social groupings. The traditional view is almost exclusively that of the 'Ulamā', who are not only the upholders of tradition but also identify the establishment of an Islamic state with the recognition of their own institution. The modernist view is held by most of the politicians, westernized businessmen, and many professionals in Pakistan. The fundamentalist approach is held by only one important fundamentalist group in Pakistan, namely, the Jama'at-i-Islami. Its supporters and sympathizers seem to be hailed from the traditional middle class, the students, and those who have failed to enter into the modern middle class in spite of holding the bachelor degree, as well as the bazaar merchants who often financially support the Jama'at. The

¹ Akram Raslan Deiranieh, "The Classical Concept of State in Islam," (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1975), 221; Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, Published Under the Auspices of The Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 116.

² See Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; reprint 1993), ix.

³ Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961).

secularists are small in number, but extremely powerful since they are the most highly westernized and are often found in important positions in the civil service and the military. The small but growing group of Pakistani industrialists tends to fall into the latter category.¹

Manzooruddin Ahmed makes a different classification in his study of Islamic constitution-making in Pakistan. Ahmed groups the traditional 'ulamā' and the fundamentalists under one broad category of traditionalists, defines the modernists as liberals, and makes a third category for the secularists who did not want an Islamic state of any kind.² Unfortunately, Ahmed does not explain the social backgrounds of the traditionalists and secularists, although, describing that of the liberals. The liberals, Ahmed writes, come mostly from the upper middle class and the aristocracy of the country. A large number of them were educated abroad, and they represent the various professions like education, law, administration, and politics.³

Ishtiaq Ahmed divides the positions held in the debates on the concept of an Islamic state into four main modes of reasoning: First, the sacred state excluding human will; second, the sacred state admitting human will; third, the secular state admitting divine will; and fourth, the secular state excluding divine will. The first mode of reasoning assumes, according to him, that God did not leave the intricacies of worldly life to the discretion of human beings, but has prescribed a clearly defined path, with detailed instructions on how to tread along it. Further, Ahmed divides this mode of reasoning into two variants: the absolutist position and the fundamentalist one.⁴

The second mode of reasoning, i.e. the sacred state admitting human will, is based on the assumption that Islam sanctions a distinct type of state which is neither wholly theocratic nor completely secular. Rather, as Ahmed describes, "it is an ideal balance between divine restrictions and human freedom". Four variants are included in this mode of reasoning: first, the theocratic position seeking adjustment with modernism; second, the theocratic position seeking severance with tradition; third, the moderate version of cohabitation between theocracy and secularism; and fourth, the radical version of cohabitation between

¹ Binder, *Religion and Politics*, 7-9.

² Manzooruddin Ahmed, *Pakistan: The Emerging Islamic State* (Karachi: The Allied Book Corporation, 1966), 11-15.

³ Ahmed, *Pakistan*, 13.

⁴ Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Controversy in Pakistan* (London: Frances Pinter, 1987), 30-32.

theocracy and secularism.¹

The third mode of reasoning is the secular state admitting divine will. This mode of reasoning, Ahmed argues, is a continuation of the modernist apology, but, in an important qualitative sense, it differs from the established second trend in that its proponents deny that Islam has provided any particular concept of the state. This is a categorical recognition of the separation of the religious and profane aspects of human existence. This mode of reasoning abandons the widespread belief that in Islam the religious and temporal spheres are linked inextricably, and it consists of two variants: the liberal version seeking continuity with the political spirit of Islam, and the socialist version seeking continuity with the economic spirit of Islam.²

The fourth mode of reasoning favors the secular state excluding divine will. Ahmed's description of this mode of reasoning is rather negative. He declares that its proponents are against the emergence of an Islamic state believing that the latter would be detrimental to the well-being of the people of Pakistan. They argue that any attempt to resurrect an Islamic state would be a vain effort to revive a bygone era. Pakistan, should, instead, become a modern secular state based on the rational aspirations of its people.³

I would like to make a different classification, which is based on the inclusion and exclusion of the *Shari'ah*. Two positions emerged from this classification that is: first, the proponents of a *Shari'ah* state, and second, the proponents of a secular state.⁴ The proponents of a *Shari'ah* state could be divided into three sub-groups: traditionalists, fundamentalists, and modernists or liberals. In reference to all those classifications, we can infer that Muhammad Asad belongs to the modernist or liberal camp of the proponents of a *Shari'ah* state which assumes that Islam sanctions a distinct type of state whose law is to be the *Shari'ah* with room for contemporary human discretion in its interpretation and application. The *Shari'ah*, according to him, is formed only by what the Qur'an and *Sunnah* have commanded. His concept of the Islamic state which admits human will is an effort to seek adjustment

¹ Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 34-35.

² Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 36-37.

³ Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 37-38; see also Muhammad Munir, *From Jinnah to Zia*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd., 1980), xv.

⁴ See Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 35-44.

with modernism. His position and view-points on state and government in Islam and the Islamic character of Pakistan will be described and analyzed with the help of the following concepts: first, the relationship between Islam and the state; second, the purpose behind the creation of Pakistan, third, the structure and organization of the state; and fourth, its economic system. Several themes, namely, the constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers of the various organs of the state, categories of citizens (including non-Muslim minorities), the position of women, and relations with the non-Muslim world will also be analyzed.¹ In illustrating Asad's ideas we will compare them with those of other persons and groups that were equally involved in the constitutional debates and the issue of the Islamic character of Pakistan.

B. The Relationship between Islam and the State

Muhammad Asad begins his book by stating that Muslims, upon acquiring their independence, are not only faced with the problem of administrative efficiency but also of ideology. And, concerning the latter problem, he asks whether Islam requires Muslims to strive for the creation of an Islamic state under all circumstances or whether, like other religions, it opposes the mixing of religion and politics.² To these questions he answers in the affirmative: Islam does require the realization of the supreme purpose of all creation i. e. the establishment of divine will on earth—which is directly dependent on the existence of an Islamic state. For Asad, a state “can become truly Islamic only by virtue of a conscious application of the socio-political tenets of Islam to the life of the nation, and by an incorporation of those tenets in the basic constitution of the country.”³ Accordingly, a state inhabited predominantly by Muslims is not necessarily an Islamic state until and unless the Islamic socio-political tenets are applied in the life of the people. This is the central theme of Asad's political treatise.

In his rejection of a secular state, Asad argues that: “...in a modern secular state there is no stable norm by which to judge between good and evil, and between right and wrong. This only possible criterion is the “nation's interest.”⁴ As to what constitutes the nation's best interest, he maintains that in a secular state, different groups of people

¹ See Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 38-40.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 1-2.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 5.

may have widely divergent views, since there is no "objective scale of moral values."¹

On the other hand, in an Islamic state, according to Asad, these moral values "do not change from case to case or from time to time but retain their validity for all times and conditions."² For Asad, only when eternal immutable standards of "right" and "wrong" exist can humankind fulfill its duty of worshipping God truly by submitting to God's will. The Islamic state is thus intrinsic to the purpose of creating a society based on complete submission to the will of God. Moreover, the realization of this purpose requires that submission to the will of God be not confined to general instruction in ethics, but to a precise body of laws which would outline, however broadly, the whole sphere of human life embodied in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.³ Asad admits that human beings have free will, but he asserts, if they wish to lead a proper Islamic life, this can only be done through participation in social life based on the Islamic pattern.⁴

Asad rejects the idea of a secular state since such a state does not submit to a universal morality but to the interests of a nation, class, or race, or some other divisive category. According to him, the people of the West "instead of submitting their decisions and actions to the criterion of a moral law—which is the ultimate aim of every higher religion—these people have come to regard expediency (in the short-term, practical connotation of the word) as the only obligation to which public affairs should be subjected; and because the ideas as to what is expedient naturally differ in every group, nation, and community, the most bewildering conflicts of interest have come to the fore in the political field, both national and international."⁵ These moral values, as symbolized by the concept of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (the enjoining of what is right and forbidding of what is wrong), must remain largely theoretical so long as there is no worldly power responsible for enforcing them in the form of an Islamic law. Consequently, this worldly power or state is an inevitable requirement of Islamic life.⁶ Asad further asserts that only religion can provide a universal code of morality, and that this function is fulfilled admirably by

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 5.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 2.

³ Asad, *State and Government*, 2-3.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁶ Asad, *Ibid.*, 4.

Islam, which is a religion meant for the good of all humankind.¹

However, there are numerous disagreements regarding the extent and details of *shari'ah* legislation. Therefore, Asad feels it necessary to make a few general observations about the concept of Islamic Law as such.² Asad regards conventional Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as extremely deep and conscientious, nevertheless, he maintains that, "the results of such studies were often highly subjective: that is, they were determined by each scholar's personal approach to, and interpretation of the legal sources of Islam, as well as by the social and intellectual environment of his age." Moreover, because of the scholars' vastly different environments, "some of these 'deductive' conclusions," Asad argues, "naturally differ from the conclusions we might reach at the present time..." Therefore, these laws have no sacrosanct value and cannot lay claim to eternal validity, and can also be changed and replaced.³

He pleads for a return to the realities of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* in order to find an Islamic solution to the cultural crisis of Islam, and rejects "the present drift of Muslim society toward Western concepts and institutions" which he believes would spell the ruin of Islam.⁴ Asad asserts that the real *shari'ah* only consists of a small number of laws based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and is far more concise and very much smaller in volume than the legal structure that evolved through the *fiqh* or the various schools of Islamic law. This limited scope of the explicit ordinances contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, Asad maintains, was meant to provide a most essential, deliberate safeguard against legal and social rigidity. Therefore, it is reasonable, according to him, to assume that the Law-Giver never intended the *Shari'ah* to cover in detail all the conceivable exigencies of life.⁵

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 9-10.

² Asad actually already wrote extensively on this topic in a series of articles entitled *This Law of Ours*. These articles were published in *Arafat* 1. no. 3, 4, 5 (November and December 1946; January 1947): 65-160. These articles, with others, have been republished in a book entitled *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (Gibraltar- Dar al-Andalus, 1987).

³ Asad, *State and Government*, 10-13.

⁴ Asad, *State and Government*, 16; Rosenthal, *National State*, 127..

⁵ Asad, *State and Government*, 13. *Shari'ah* is "the religious law of God: consisting of such ordinances as those of fasting and prayer and pilgrimage and the giving of the poor rate; and marriage, and other acts." It signifies also a law, an ordinance, or a statute, a religion, or way of belief and practice in respect of religion." *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1984 ed., s. v. "shari'ah," by E. W. Lane.

He emphasizes the need for fresh *ijtihad*,¹ and by stressing this need for free inquiry, he urges Muslims to give up their sterile reliance on what the previous generations of Muslim scholars believed to be "final" verdicts on the socio-political laws of Islam. Hence, he encourages Muslims to begin thinking about these laws anew, in a creative manner, and on the basis of their own study of the original sources. Lastly, he draws two important conclusions: first, that "the concept of Islamic Law—especially with regard to public law—acquires once again that simplicity which had been envisaged for it by the Law-Giver but has subsequently been buried under many layers of conventional and frequently arbitrary interpretation." Second, that "the outward forms and functions of an Islamic state need not necessarily correspond to any historical precedent." This conclusion, according to Asad, is most pertinent given the problems faced by Muslims.²

C. The Purpose behind the Creation of Pakistan

Asad discusses the purpose behind the creation of Pakistan in his article, *What do we mean by Pakistan?*³ He believes that there is no

According to Asad, *Shari'ah* consists of either general principles, within which, detailed rules can be introduced through *ijtihad*, or detailed rules in matters not affected by changes caused by human social development. This Asad's concept of *Shari'ah* which excludes *fiqh* (jurisprudence) is different from historical concept of *Shari'ah* that includes moral and pastoral theology and ethics, high spiritual aspiration, and detailed ritualistic and formal observance: it encompasses all aspects of public and private law, hygiene, and even courtesy and good manners. The latter concept of *Shari'ah* includes *fiqh*. See An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 9 and 11.

¹ Asad mentions Ibn Hazm of Cordova (384-456 A. H./994-1064 C. E.) who in his great work, *Al-Muhalla* held that the far large area of things and activities which the Law-Giver has left unspecified must be regarded as allowable (*mubal*) from the *shar'i* point of view. He based this assumption on the saying of the Prophet Muhammad that: "Do not ask me about matters which I have left unspoken: for, behold, there were people before you who went to their doom because they had put too many questions to their prophets and thereupon disagreed [about their teachings]. Therefore, if I command you to do anything, do it as much as you are able to; and if I forbid you from doing anything, abstain from it." See Asad, *State and Government*, 13-14. For Ibn Hazm's religious ideas and doctrine, see A. G. Chejne, *Ibn Hazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 109-131.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 16-17.

³ This article was published in *Arafat* (May 1947), and republished in *This Law of*

future for Islam in India until Pakistan becomes a reality, and that, if it becomes a reality in the Indian sub-continent, it might bring about a spiritual revolution in the whole Muslim world. According to him, the real and historic justification for the demand for Pakistan is to be found in the Muslims' desire to establish a truly Islamic polity, and to apply the tenets of Islam in practical life. He criticizes Muslims who do not seem to care for the spiritual, Islamic objectives of Pakistan, and who permit themselves to be carried away by sentiments not far removed from nationalism. It thus seems that in doing so he was referring to Western educated Muslims who prefer of a secular Pakistani state.¹

Explaining the uniqueness of Pakistan, Asad maintains that the Muslim masses — in the former British India—feel and know that their communal existence is not based on racial affinities or on the consciousness of common cultural traditions, but only— exclusively— on the fact of their common adherence to the ideology of Islam. Therefore, Asad argues, they must justify their communal existence by erecting a socio-political structure in which that ideology—the *Shari'ah*—would become the visible expression of their nationhood. Accordingly, Asad holds that the political ideals of Pakistanis are entirely different from the ideals of other Muslims such as the Turks, the Egyptians, the Afghans etc., since Pakistanis at the time were alone among all the Muslim peoples to find the way back to the concept of the *Ummah*. In this respect, the Pakistan movement, according to him, is truly unique among all the political mass movements in the Muslim world.²

Asad is firm in his belief in the Islamic objective of Pakistan, and thus criticizes those Pakistani leaders who do not seem to make a serious attempt to show that Islam is the paramount objective of their struggle. He asserts that it should be the leaders' duty to tell their followers that they must become better Muslims *today* in order to be

Ours, 71-88.

¹ *This Law of Ours*, 72-73. Compare this to Iqbal's view of Islam as an ethical idea and a polity when he said: "The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created... Therefore, the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim." See Muhammad Iqbal. "The Concept of a Separate Muslim State in the Subcontinent," in Aziz Ahmad and G. E. von Grunbaum. eds., *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), 148.

² *This Law of Ours*, 74-75

worthy Pakistan's *tomorrow*. He discusses also the need to prove to non-Muslims, firstly, that an Islamic polity connotes justice for all, and, secondly, that Muslims are really serious in their avowals that precisely such a polity is their goal. He further says: "We want, through Pakistan, to make Islam a reality in our lives. We want Pakistan in order that every one of us should be able to live a truly Islamic life in the widest sense of the word." He emphasizes the role of Islamic law in this kind of Pakistan by stating that it is impossible "for an individual to live in accordance with the scheme propounded by God's Apostle unless the whole society consciously conforms to it and makes the Law of Islam the law of the land."¹

D. The Structure and Organization of the State

Asad illustrates that the ultimate purpose of the Islamic state is to provide a political framework for Muslim unity and cooperation.² Thus, according to him, an Islamic state is not "a goal or an end in itself but only a means: the goal being the growth of a community of people who stand up for equity and justice, for right and against wrong—or, to put it more precisely, a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of such social conditions as would enable the greatest possible number of human beings to live, morally as well as physically, in accordance with the natural Law of God, Islam".³ He further states that the development of a strong sense of brotherhood among the community is an indispensable prerequisite to such an achievement.⁴ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that he condemns nationalism as opposed to the "fundamental Islamic principle of the equality of all men and states that Muslim unity must be of an ideological nature, transcending all considerations of race and origin: a brotherhood of people bound together by nothing but their consciousness of a common faith and a common moral outlook".⁵ Asad concludes that, "it is such a community of ideals alone that can provide a justifiable basis for all human groupment; whereas, on the other hand, the placing of the real or imaginary interests of one's nation or country above moral

¹ *This Law of Ours*, 78-81.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 30. Asad here refers to Surah 2:103-104.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 32.

considerations has been condemned by the Prophet..."¹

If the state acts according to all the principles espoused by Islam it "can rightly be described as 'God's vice-gerent on earth'; its foremost duty... consists in enforcing the ordinances of the *Shari'ah* in the territories under its jurisdiction".² He therefore demands that "the constitution must explicitly lay down that no temporal legislation or administrative ruling, be it mandatory or permissive, shall be valid if it is found to contravene any stipulation of the *Shari'ah*."³ Obedience to legally constituted authority is a religious duty and must be rendered as long as the government acts within *Shari'ah*. The community must supervise the actions of the government which is "subject to the people's consent". This popular consent depends on the free election of the government by the people.⁴

Asad repeats the standard doctrine that sovereignty in an Islamic state belongs to God. However, the Muslim community exercises vicarious sovereignty, he admits, which means that while the Islamic state owes its existence to the will of the people (who voluntarily create the Islamic state), it derives its sovereignty from God, and not the people. He also argues that because "in a consciously Islamic society the people's consent to a particular method of government and a particular scheme of sociopolitical cooperation is but a result of their having accepted Islam as a Divine Ordinance, there can be no question of their being endowed with sovereignty *in their own right*." Thus, Asad concludes that "the real source of all sovereignty is the will of God as manifested in the ordinances of the *Shari'ah*. The power of the Muslim community is of a vicarious kind, being held, as it were, in trust from God; and so the Islamic state—which, as we have seen, owes its existence to the will of the people and is subject to control by them—derives its sovereignty, ultimately, from God."⁵

Interestingly, Asad held that the Qur'an and *Sunnah* do not lay

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 32. The Prophet said: "He is not of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship; and he is not of us who fights in the cause of tribal partisanship; and he is not of us who dies in the cause of tribal partisanship." (Abu Dawud, on the authority of Jubayr ibn Mut'im). The meaning of tribal partisanship (*asabiyyah*), in the words of the Prophet is: "[It means] your helping your own people in an unjust cause." (Abu Dawud, on the authority of Wathilah ibn al-Asqa'). See Asad, *State and Government*; 32.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 34.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴ See Rosenthal, *National State*, 129; Asad, *State and Government*, 36.

⁵ Asad, *State and Government*, 37-39.

down any specific form of government and state, nor elaborate a constitutional theory. However, according to him, "The political law emerging from the context of Qur'an and *Sunnah* is, nevertheless, not an illusion. It is very vivid and concrete inasmuch as it gives us the clear outline of a political scheme capable of realization at all times and under all conditions of human life."¹ Further, with reference to the problem which Pakistanis were facing, he states that "there is not only one form of the Islamic state, but many; and it is for the Muslims of every period to discover the form most suitable to their needs—on the condition, of course, that the form and the institutions they choose are in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal *shar'i* laws relating to communal life."²

Asad shows strong concern with constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers of the various organs of the state. Therefore, he emphasized the principle of consultation which is to be observed under all circumstances. By quoting a Qur'anic verse³ concerning the application, this principle, he believed that this injunction must be regarded as the fundamental operative clause of all Islamic thought relating to statecraft. Moreover, he maintained that the *nass*⁴ "is so comprehensive that it reaches out into almost every department of political life, and it is so self-expressive and unequivocal that no attempt at arbitrary interpretation can change its purport. The word *amr* in this injunction refers to all affairs of a communal nature and therefore also to the manner in which the government of an Islamic state is to be established: that is, to the elective principle underlying all governmental

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 22-23.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 23.

³ "Their [the Believers'] communal business [*amr*] is to be [transacted in] consultation among themselves." Q. 42:38.

⁴ *Nass* (pl. *nusus*) literally means 'text', 'wording', 'version'. See *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed., s. v. "Nass," by Hans Wehr, ed. J. Milton Cowan. Edward William Lane summarises and defines the term *nass* in relation to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as "a statement plainly, or explicitly, declared or made manifest by God and His Apostle; ... an expression, or a phrase, or a sentence, indicating a particular meaning, not admitting any other than it; ... a statute or an ordinance indicated by the manifest, or plain, meaning of words of the Qur'an and of the *Sunnah*. See *Arabic-English Lexicon* 1984 ed., s. v. "Nass" by E. W. Lane. Others describe *nass* as follows: "The *nass* of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* denotes the injunctions (*ahkam*) contained in the plain (*zahir*) wording of these sources". See *Lisan al-'Arab*, 1971 ed., s. v. "Nass" by Ibn Manzur.

authority.”¹ Following in the steps of other modernists, Asad also wants to see the concept of *shura* become a reality in the life of the *Ummah*. This is all the more urgent, since Muslims have for centuries been the victims of “every kind of oppression and exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous rulers.”²

Concerning the source of state sovereignty, Asad seems to strike a middle course between the notion of God’s sovereignty and that of people’s sovereignty. Therefore, while defending and advocating the rights of people to rule, he, on the basis of his interpretation of a Qur’anic verse (3:26), comes to the conclusion that: “... so the Islamic state—which ... owes its existence to the will of the people and is subject to control by them—derives its sovereignty, ultimately, from God.”³ What he meant by the sovereignty of God is nothing other than the sovereignty of the *Shari’ah* over the actions of the citizens of an Islamic state.⁴ From this line of argument, Asad then developed the concept of obedience on the part of the people, based on a *hadith* narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim. This *hadith* says: “He who obeys me, obeys God; and he who disobeys me, disobeys God. And he who obeys the *amir* [i.e., the head of the state], obeys me; and who disobey the *amir*, disobeys me.”⁵

Asad insists on ideological purity and justifies the action of the state which distinguishes between its Muslim and the non-Muslim citizens. While the non-Muslim citizen is to enjoy full religious, cultural and social freedom, he admits that “without a certain amount of differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim there can be no question of our ever having an Islamic state or states in the sense envisaged in Qur’an and *Sunnah*”.⁶ In practice, this means that “they may not be entrusted with the key position of leadership”.⁷ A non-Muslim could not “work wholeheartedly for the ideological objectives of Islam; nor in fairness could such a demand be made of him”.⁸

Concerning the head of the state, Asad maintains that only a person who believes in the Divine origin of Islamic law, i. e. a Muslim,

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 44.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 37.

³ Asad, *State and Government*, 39.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ Asad, *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷ Asad, *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸ See Rosenthal, *National State*, 130; Asad, *State and Government*, 41.

may be entrusted with the office of head of state. This condition stems from his belief that the real purpose of an Islamic state is not the "self-determination" of a racial or cultural entity but the establishment of Islamic Law as a practical arbitrator in human affairs. Realizing the concert of modern political thought, Asad admits that a theoretical discrimination on the grounds of religion may be unpalatable to many Muslims, not to mention the non-Muslim minorities living in their midst. However, Asad argues, this is not a discriminative policy against non-Muslim citizens in the ordinary spheres of life. "On the contrary, they must be accorded all the freedom and protection which a Muslim citizen can legitimately claim: only they may not be entrusted with the key position of leadership," Asad says.¹ Non-Muslims, for instance, can seek employment in state services, and may even be taken into the armed forces, in which case they will be exempted from the *jizyah*.²

Asad emphasizes the need for continuous, temporal legislation since, according to him, the *Shari'ah* deliberately refrains from providing detailed regulations for all the manifold, changing requirements of social existence. In an Islamic state, "this legislation would relate to the many problems of administration not touched upon by the *Shari'ah* at all, as well as the problems with regard to which the *Shari'ah* has provided general principles but no detailed laws," Asad says.³ The problem which Asad tried to solve concerns the manner through which new laws are to be enacted as well as the persons who are to enact these laws. There is no question, according to him, that "in matters affecting the communal side of our life no legislative *ijtihādi* decisions can possibly be left to the discretion of individuals: they must be based on a definite consensus (*ijmā'*) of the whole community..."⁴ Moreover, those who are to enact these temporal, communal legislations are to be a limited group of persons to whom the community could delegate its legislative powers and whose decisions would be binding on all. Moreover, since "possession of absolute power often corrupts its possessor and tempts him to abuse it, consciously or unconsciously, in his own interest or in that of his partisans,"⁵ the legislative powers of the state, in Asad's view,

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 40-41.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 74. *Jizyah* is the tax that is taken, from the free non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim government. *Arabic-English Lexicon* 1984 ed., s. v. "*Jizyah*," by E. W. Lane.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 44.

should be vested in a body of legislators whom the community would elect for this specific purpose.¹ In addition, since the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* do not provide clear-cut instructions concerning the procedure and method of elections, they are to be left to the *ijtihad* of the community which must decide according to the needs of its time.²

All temporal legislation is to be entrusted to the community which must carry out its task by means of *ijtihad*, that is, the exercise of independent reasoning in consonance with the spirit of Islamic Law and the best interest of the nation. However, it is to be noted that, whereas Asad had previously demanded *ijtihad* to be "in consonance with the spirit of Islam",³ he now seems to simultaneously widen and restrict its scope by adding a furthermost important principle to it. This principle was emphasized by Rashid Ridā, with whom Asad has much in common, that is the principle of *maslahah*, "the best interest of the nation".⁴ At the same time the word "Islam" in his phrase "the spirit of Islam" has now become "Islamic Law"⁵ while "community" was used to denote the whole community,⁶ particularly the Legislative Assembly, to which he gave the traditional Muslim name of *majlis al-shura*, which must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women. Thus, Asad seems to respond to present circumstances which can and must legitimately be taken into account for all legislation outside of, and additional to, the *Shari'ah*.⁷

In Asad's view such a representative character can be achieved only through free and general elections, and, the members of the *majlis* must be elected by means of the widest possible suffrage, including both men and women. The method of elections—direct or indirect, transferable or non-transferable vote, regional or proportional representation, and so forth—according to Asad, "has not been laid down in the *Shari'ah* and is, therefore, a matter for communal decision".⁸

Asad, however, mentions one important point which is crucial to the method of election. This point is based on a prophetic tradition which prohibits self-canvassing. According to him, the Prophet

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 44.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 45.

³ Asad, *State and Government*, 14.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶ Asad, *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷ See Rosenthal, *National State*. 130-131; Asad, *State and Government* 43-45.

⁸ Asad, *State and Government*, 46.

consistently refused to make any administrative appointment whenever the person concerned asked for it. Thus, he concludes, "it would be in full keeping with the spirit of the *Shari'ah* if the constitution of an Islamic state would explicitly declare that self-canvassing by any person desirous of being appointed to an administrative post (including that of head of the state) or of being elected to a representative assembly shall automatically disqualify that person from being elected or appointed."¹ Asad, of course, is aware that such a requirement puts the candidate in a difficult position—being barred from delivering electioneering speeches—, but is nevertheless convinced that with this kind of method, only a person enjoying well-deserved and unsolicited esteem among the electorate would have a genuine chance of success.²

In modern times, according to Asad, the election of the members of the *majlis al-shūra* (*shūra* council) must have the widest possible basis, in which both men and women would participate.³ Moreover, since the legislative work of the *majlis al-shūra* will relate to matters of public concern, and more particularly to matters which have not been regulated in terms of law by the *nusūs* of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, it is highly improbable that the members of the *majlis* will always view a given social situation in exactly the same light and, consequently, reach full unanimity as to the legislative measures required to meet that situation. Therefore, Asad holds that difference of opinion should be allowed in the assembly since it stimulates reflection, and emphasizes that difference of opinion was even praised by the Prophet.⁴ Indeed the validity of the majority principle is to be found in the *hadiths* of the Prophet.⁵

Given the fact that Islam allows for difference of opinion, Asad held that the right to form political parties should be equally recognized. This political grouping, in Asad's view, has the purpose of propagating certain sets of views as to what should be the policy of the state on this

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 46-47.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 47.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴ Asad quotes a Prophetic *hadith* that praises difference of opinion. It runs as follows: "The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of] God's grace." (Al-Suyuti, *al-Jami' al-Saghir*). Asad, *State and Government*, 47-48.

⁵ Follow the largest group." (Ibn Mājah, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar). "It is your duty to stand by the united community and the majority [*al-'āmmah*]." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on the authority of Mu'ādh ibn Jabal). Asad, *State and Government*, 49-50.

or that question, and provided that those views do not run counter to the ideology on which the state is based—that is the *Shari'ah*—the parties thus constituted must have the right to argue them in and outside the *majlis al-shūra*. “However,” Asad says, “this freedom to form parties and to advocate their programs should not be allowed to influence the administrative practice of the government—as it necessarily would if the latter were composed of ministers who receive their mandate from, and remain responsible to, the party organizations represented in the *majlis*.”¹

Asad believes that the presidential form of government, rather than the “parliamentary” one, is the best option for the Islamic state, as it corresponds to the Islamic concept of caliph or *amir*. A strong head of state possessing the necessary qualifications to lead the community should be entrusted with the job, he adds. Moreover, his ministers ought not to be more than his administrative assistants or “secretaries”, appointed by him at his own discretion and responsible directly to him.²

But, Asad holds, the *amir* (head of state) is to be bound by the temporal legislation enacted by the *majlis al-shūra* and by its decisions on major questions of policy. “However,” Asad maintains, “the manner in which he translates those decisions and directives into terms of day-to-day administration is left to the discretion of the executive over which he presides; and although the *majlis*, on the other hand, is empowered to frame the temporal laws on the basis of which the country is to be governed, to decide the major policies which are to be pursued, and in a general way to supervise the activities of the government, it is not entitled to interfere with the day-to-day working of the executive.”³ Therefore, he concludes that “the *amir* must possess executive powers within the fullest meaning of these words.” An office of head of state deprived of all real power and reduced to a mere figurehead, according to Asad, “is obviously redundant from the viewpoint of the Qur’anic injunction which makes the Muslims’ obedience to those who hold authority’ [*ulu l-amr*] a corollary of their obedience to God and His Apostle.”⁴

Asad also discusses the necessity of having an impartial machinery for arbitration, in order to solve any fundamental differences between the *majlis al-shūra* (legislature) and the *amir* (executive). Based on

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 61.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 61.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴ Q. 4: 59. Asad, *State and Government*; 58.

a Qur'anic verse,¹ Asad proposes a supreme judicial tribunal which would have the right and the duty to arbitrate in all instances of disagreement between the *amir* and the *majlis al-shūra* referred to the tribunal by either of the two sides, to veto, on its own accord, any legislative act passed by the *majlis* or any administrative act on the part of the *amir* which, in the tribunal's considered opinion, goes against a *nass* of the Qur'an or *Sunnah*. In effect, this tribunal would be the guardian of the constitution.²

The question of the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states of the modern world appears in his discussion of *jihād*. Asad insists on its purely defensive character, since Islam forbids wars of aggression, as demonstrated by Qur'anic verses. Moreover, since war is only permissible in self-defence, the non-Muslim citizens share with the Muslims the duty to take up arms in defence of the Islamic state. Yet, they are entitled to exemption on grounds of conscience in which case they must pay the *jizyah*.³

In dealing with the rights and duties of citizens, Asad advocates obedience to the state so long as its policies are based on the ordinances of the Qur'an. No obedience, however, is due to a sinful, oppressive or unjust ruler, and the right to rebellion can only be exercised in extreme cases when the government falls into the hands of persons who behave like infidels.⁴ Normally, an unobservant ruler should be forced into

¹ "Obey God and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you. Then, if you disagree in anything, refer it to God and the Apostle." (Q. 4: 59). In commencing on this verse Asad says that disputes should be solved through referral to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*—or, to be more explicit, to a body of arbitrators who, after an impartial study of the problem, must decide which of the two conflicting views is closer to the spirit of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. See Asad, *State and Government*, 66.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 66-67.

³ Q. 2: 190-193; Asad, *State and Government*, 70-75.

⁴ Asad relates this to several of the Prophet's traditions: "The highest kind is to speak up for truth in the face of a government [*sultan*] that deviates from the right path." (Abu Da'ud, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Mājah, on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri); "If any of you sees something evil, he should set it right by his hand; if he is unable to do so, then by his tongue; and if he is unable to do even that, then within his heart—but this is the weakest form of faith". (Muslim, on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri); "No obedience is due in sinful matters: behold, obedience is due only in the way of righteousness [*fi al-ma'ruf*]. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim, on the authority of 'Ali). In other versions of this Tradition, the Prophet is reported to have used the expressions: "No obedience is due to one who does not obey God." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on the

mending his ways through peaceful pressure. Thus, the citizens have the right and duty to watch over the activities of the government and to criticize its administrative and legislative policies whenever there is reason to suppose that matters are wrongly handled. Nevertheless, this does not mean that citizens have the right to always rise in rebellion against the government whenever the latter contravenes any of the *shari'* laws.¹

In relation to the extent of the citizens' patience with an unjust government, Asad lays down four principles: first, so long as the *amir* represents the legally established government, all citizens owe him their allegiance, however much one or another of them may dislike his person and, on occasion, even his administrative acts; second, if the government issues laws or regulations which involve the commission of a sin in the strict *shari'* sense, the duty of obedience ceases to be operative with regard to these laws or regulations; third, if the government sets itself openly and deliberately against the *nass* ordinances of the Qur'an, it may be deemed to have become guilty of infidelity, whereupon authority should be withdrawn from it; and fourth, this withdrawal of authority must never be brought about by armed rebellion on the part of a minority within the community. To prove this last principle, Asad quotes two Prophetic traditions.²

Interestingly, Asad suggests the use of referendums as forum for gathering consensus against any acts of the government which are contrary to the *Shari'ah*, and even to depose the government which its behavior amounts to flagrant infidelity. The holding of popular

authority of Mu'adh ibn Jabal); "No obedience is due to one who rebels against God." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on the authority of 'Ubadah ibn al-Samit). See Asad, *State and Government*, 76-77.

¹ Asad relies on several *hadiths* to prove this point: "He who has pledged allegiance to a leader [imam], giving his hand and the fruit of his heart, shall obey him if [or: "as long as"] he can". (Muslim, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr): "If anyone sees in his *amir* something that displeases him, let him [nevertheless] remain patient; for behold, he who separates himself from the united community by even so much as a handspan and dies thereupon, has died the death of the Time of Ignorance." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas). Asad, *State and Government*, 77-78.

² "He who raises arms against us ceases to be one of us [i.e., ceases to belong to the Muslim community]." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayrah). And, "He who unsheathes his sword against us ceases to be one of us." (Muslim, on the authority of Salamah ibn al-Akwa'). See Asad, *State and Government*, 79-80.

referendums would fall within the purview of the tribunal. Asad further maintains that: "if, by means of such a referendum, the majority of the community pronounce themselves against the *amir*, he must be regarded as having been legally deposed, whereupon the people's pledge of allegiance to him ceases to be effective."¹

Asad also mentions three cardinal rights of citizens, namely: *freedom of opinion*, the *protection of citizens* and *free and compulsory education*. Concerning the freedom of opinion, Asad says that the citizens have every right to criticize the government and to propose alternative lines of action. However, according to him, the state cannot permit criticism of the *Shari'ah*, the preaching rebellion against the state and the dissemination of indecent ideas. This right is part of one's duty to combat evil wherever one encounters it, and to strive for justice whenever people disregard it.²

The citizens also have the right to have their life and property protected. Similarly, the individual citizen's obligation to respect and honor the legally established government must find its counterpart in the government's duty to extend its protection to the private lives of the citizens. The protection which the state must grant to the citizens, according to Asad, is not limited to the tangible factors of their existence, such as their persons and possessions, but must extend to their dignity and honor and the privacy of their homes as well.³

Asad draws a connection between the citizen's duty and political freedom, as well as the latter's possession of sound knowledge. "Consequently," Asad says, "it is the citizens' right and the government's duty to have a system of education which would make knowledge freely accessible to every man and woman in the state."⁴ "It

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 80.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 81-83.

³ Asad quotes the sayings of the Prophet as follows: "Behold your lives and your possessions shall be as inviolable among you as the sacred inviolability of this very day [of Pilgrimage]." (Muslim, on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah). "The blood, property and honour of a Muslim must be sacred [*harām*] to every [other] Muslim." (Muslim, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah). Asad, *State and Government*, 84-86.

⁴ Asad mentions several Prophetic traditions, such as: "If anybody goes on his way in search of knowledge, God will thereby make easy for him the way to Paradise." (Muslim, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah). "The search for knowledge is a sacred duty [*farīdah*] imposed on every Muslim man and woman." (Ibn Mājah, on the authority of Anas). Asad, *State and Government*, 86-87.

follows therefore,” Asad concludes, “that a state which owes its justification to the call of Islam and aims at establishing the Law of Islam as the law of the land must make education not only accessible but also compulsory for every Muslim man and woman: and because it is one of the basic tenets of such a state to make all the facilities of life available to its non-Muslim citizen as well, education must be free and compulsory for all citizens, regardless of religion”.¹

He further maintains that Islam “is a complete, self-contained ideology which regards all aspects of our existence—moral and physical, spiritual and intellectual, personal and communal—as parts of the indivisible whole which are called ‘human life’ ”,² hence “its adherents cannot live a truly Islamic life merely by holding Islamic beliefs... the socio-economic laws of Islam” must be equally enforced.³

His sense of moral obligation and responsibility is clearly expressed in his comment on Surah 3:110. He says that “Our being a righteous community depends, therefore, on our being prepared to struggle, always and under all circumstances, for the upholding of justice and for the abolition of injustice for *all* people: and this should preclude the possibility of a truly Islamic community ever being unjust to the non-Muslims living in its midst”.⁴

Asad is also sensitive to the issue of modern Islamic legislation, which Joseph Schacht observes as “an important, if it is not, the most important, manifestation of Islamic modernism, of modern thought in Islam.”⁵ Therefore, we need to take a look at Asad’s Islamic legal theory, in which he expresses the need to translate Islamic social and economic programs into political action. He advocates “a concise, clearly comprehensible code of *shar’i* laws”,⁶ unencumbered with the elaborations of conventional *fiqh*. Indeed, he advocates “a code of the *shari’ah* which (a) would be generally acceptable to all its Muslim citizens without distinction of the *fiqhi* schools to which they may belong, and (b) would bring out the eternal, unchangeable quality of the Divine Law in such a way as to demonstrate its applicability to all times and all stages

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 87.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 95.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵ Joseph Schacht, “Problems of Modern Islamic Legislation,” *Studia Islamica*, 12 (1967): 99.

⁶ Asad, *State and Government*, 100.

of man's social and intellectual development".¹ He is against the harmonization of existing *fiqh* as well as its revision in light of modern conditions because such a revision would become obsolete sooner or later, and need to be revised again until nothing of the Law of Islam would be left. This would negate the very concept of a Divine Law. His remedy then is to separate "God's true *shari'ah* from all man-made, deductive, *fiqhi* laws".²

In his discussion of the method of codification, Asad proposes that the *majlis al-shura* elect a small panel of scholars to concentrate exclusively on "such ordinances of Qur'an and *Sunnah* as (a) answer fully to the linguistic definition of *nass*—that is to say, injunctions and statements which are self-evident (*zahir*) in their wording, having a particular meaning which does not admit more than one interpretation; (b) are expressed in terms of command (*amr*) or prohibition (*nahy*) and (c) have a direct bearing on man's social behavior and action."³

Asad realizes that many *ahādith* have to be reconsidered. Therefore, while admitting that a selection of *nass* ordinances from the Qur'an is comparatively easy, "the application of the above principles to *ahādith* will necessitate a thorough examination of each item against its proper historical background," he concedes. Consequently, he advocates the usage of Traditions which meet the highest standards of historical and technical criticism only, and the exclusion of all Traditions to which the slightest legitimate objections may be raised regarding their authenticity. Asad also suggests that scholars must differentiate carefully between the ordinances intended by the Prophet for all times and circumstances, and those which were obviously meant to meet the needs of a particular occasion or time.⁴

In addition, Asad declares that scholars must not select disjointed verses of the Qur'an or individual *ahādith*, but to consider fully the entire context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. In his view, most existing *ahādith*, however, are no more than fragments of the Prophet's sayings or description of isolated incidents, often taken out of their historical context, in his life as leader and legislator. Consequently, according to him, one should never overlook the fact that the Qur'an and *Sunnah* form one integral whole, elucidating one another. Hence, the proposed

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 100-101.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 101-102.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 103-104.

shar'i code must contain cross references from both sources.¹

Interestingly, Asad proposes a multi-national system of modern Islamic legislation, in which the *nusūs* of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* would be placed together and circulated among the competent scholars throughout the Muslim world with a view to obtaining suggestions and criticisms, especially with regard to the method by which the ordinances based on the *ahādith* had been derived.² The criticisms and suggestions received should be carefully considered and utilized in the final revision of the collection of ordinances. whereupon it shall be submitted to the *majlis al-shūra* for adoption as the Basic Law of the land. The fact that the codification only brings out the ordinances which have a *ṣābir* quality, that are not subject to conflicting interpretations, "will not only make the code acceptable to all Muslims, but will also result in a code of public law that is small in volume, extremely concise, and therefore easily accessible to the understanding of every Muslim man and woman of average intelligence and education,"³ Asad elucidates.

E. The Economic System

Asad believes that it is the state's responsibility to provide citizens with material welfare and economic facilities which are necessary for the maintenance of human happiness and dignity. In his view, "Islam demands a society that is righteous not only in its moral outlook, but in its deeds as well; a society that provides not only for the spiritual needs of its members, but for their bodily needs as well."⁴ Consequently, a state in order to be truly Islamic, according to him, has three responsibilities. Firstly, it must arrange the affairs of the community in such a way that every individual, man and woman, shall enjoy that minimum of material well-being without which there can be no human dignity, no real freedom and, in the last resort, no spiritual progress. Secondly, "that all the resources of the state must be harnessed to the task of providing adequate means of livelihood for all its citizens."⁵ Thirdly, "that all the opportunities in this respect should be open to all citizens equally, and that no person should enjoy a high standard of

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 104.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 104-105.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴ Asad, *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 88.

living at the expense of others.”¹

Asad shows that there can be no happiness and strength in a society that permits some of its members to suffer undeserved want while others have more than they need.² He based this conclusion on several *hadiths* which emphasize that mutual cooperation in all phases of life is a fundamental requirement of Islam. No state, according to Asad, can therefore be called Islamic unless it guides that cooperation by legislative means.³ He also warns that “if the available resources of a community are so unevenly distributed that certain groups within it live in affluence while the majority of the people are forced to use up all their energies in search of their daily bread, poverty becomes the most dangerous enemy of spiritual progress, and occasionally drives whole communities away from God-consciousness and into the arms of soul-destroying materialism.”⁴ Further, Asad says that the Islamic state must make sure that “equity prevails within the community, and that every citizen—man, woman, and child—shall have enough to eat and to wear, shall be succored in case of illness, and have a decent home in which to live.”⁵

In pursuance of this aforementioned aim, Asad offers a concrete proposal. He proposes that the constitution of Pakistan must contain a provision to the effect that “every citizen has a right to (a) productive and remunerative work while of working age and in good health, (b) training—at the expense of the state, if necessary—for such productive work, (c) free and efficient health services in cases of illness, and (d) a provision by the state of adequate nourishment, clothing and shelter in cases of disability resulting from illness, widowhood, unemployment due to circumstances beyond individual control, old age, or under-age.”⁶ Such a constitutional enactment, according to him, would presuppose

¹ Asad, *Ibid.*, 88.

² Asad, *Ibid.*, 90.

³ For example: “You shall not enter Paradise until you have faith; and you cannot attain faith until you love one another.” (Muslim, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah). “Have compassion on those who are on earth, and the One Who is in heaven will have compassion on you.” (Al-Tirmidhi and Abu Da’ud, on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr). “God will show no compassion to one who has no compassion toward all human beings.” (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim, on the authority of Jarir ibn ‘Abd Allah). Asad, *State and Government*, 89.

⁴ Asad, *State and Government*, 90.

⁵ Asad, *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁶ Asad, *Ibid.*, 91.

the creation of a nationwide social insurance scheme, to be financed by means of a comprehensive taxation of wealth. This taxation is in accordance both with the Prophet's injunctions,¹ and the historical practice of the Islamic Commonwealth at the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.²

F. Analysis

In this part we will try to deal mainly with six issues which the present writer conceives to be the most important ones, and which have been thoroughly discussed by Asad, namely, the relationship between Islam and the state, the supremacy of the *Shari'ah*, the position of non-Muslims and women, the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states, the control of power, and modern Islamic legislation. The relationship between Islam and the state has long been a delicate and controversial subject both in the Muslim world and in academic circles, and is the central theme of Asad's political treatise. As we have already noted above, Asad, in accordance with Islamic jurists and political theoreticians, advocates the unity of religion and politics. Moreover, in his rejection of the secular state, he argues that the Islamic state is only a vehicle by which the Islamic moral values can be enforced in the socio-political life of the *Ummah*.³

The question then is that why almost all Muslim scholars, like Asad, reject, to different extents, the secular state. It seems that one reason why those Muslims oppose secularism is based on their understanding of the terms 'secular' and 'secularism', as defined in dictionaries. Indeed, secularism is invariably defined as "opposed to religion", or as a "secular spirit or tendency, especially a system of

¹ "It shall be taken from the rich among them and turned over to the poor among them". (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim, on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas). Asad, *State and Government*, 91.

² It was 'Umar the great who, in the year 20 A.H., inaugurated a special government department, called *diwan*, for the purpose of holding a census of the population at regular intervals. On the basis of this census, annual state pensions were fixed for (a) widows and orphans, (b) all persons who had been in the forefront of the struggle for Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet, beginning with his widows, the survivors of the Battle of Badr, the early *muhājirs*, and so forth, and (c) all disabled, sick, and old persons. See Asad, *State and Government*, 92.

³ See Asad, *State and Government*, 4-10.

political or social philosophy, that rejects all forms of religious faith.”¹ Moreover, the word suggests that morality should be based solely in regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, and to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or a future life.²

In fact, there are other definitions and changes to the concept of secularism since it was first conceived. One of the best definitions of a secular state has been given by the American scholar, Donald Eugene Smith who states that: “The secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen, irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seem either to promote or interfere with religion.”³ Akin to this definition, Charles Davis, in his discussion of the relation between religion and society, states that “a secular society is a society or people that has not committed itself as a collectivity to a single set of ultimate beliefs and values.” From this definition, he concludes that a secular, pluralist society is not secularist in the sense of embodying an ideology hostile to religion.⁴

The most prominent example of that type of secular society is American society. Alexis de Tocqueville, a Roman Catholic member of the French nobility lived through the French revolution, and then travelled to see the new social and political order which had just been implemented in North America. On his arrival in the United States the

¹ Jess Stein and Laurence Urdang, eds., *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1971), 1289-1290.

² J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d. ed., vol. 14 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 849; Rafiq Zakaria, *The Struggle within Islam: The Conflict between Religion and Politics*. (Viking, 1988; Penguin Books, 1989), 20.

³ Donald Eugene Smith, *India as a Secular State* (Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1963), 4.

⁴ Charles Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2. The terms Secularism and secularization historically began and grew out in Christian-European societies. The word secularization, according to Chadwick, “began as an emotive word, not far in its origins from the word anticlericalism. Sometimes it meant a freeing of the sciences, of learning, of the arts, from their theological origins or theological bias. Sometimes it meant the declining influence of churches, or of religion, in modern society.” See Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; Canto ed., 1993), 64. For a deep and thorough discussion in the context of Muslim society see Niyazi Berkes. *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964).

religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck his attention. In America, unlike in France, he found the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country. The causes of this phenomenon, according to his investigation, lay mainly on the separation of church and state. While he underlined the importance of religion as another form of hope and the only permanent state of humankind, he thought the Americans were right to disconnect it with state. He perceived that as long as a religion rests only upon the natural desires of immortality and of hope which are the consolation of all affliction, it may attract the affections of all humankind. But, if political power is legitimated by religious authorities and church and state are perceived as supporting and upholding each other, then when the people turn against the state, they will probably also turn against the religion. For him, the church cannot share the temporal power of the state without being the object of a portion of that animosity which the latter excites.¹

It appears that some Muslim scholars agree with the second definition of a secular state, i.e. that which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion.² But most of them seem to maintain that American-Christian experience could not be implanted in Muslim society. From Berkes' discussion of the development of secularism in Turkey, it is evident that the distinction between the Christian and Islamic experiences lies in the differences in the institutions and hierarchies within the religion, which influenced the relationship between the religious and political authorities. De Tocqueville, as discussed before, talked much about the relation between church and priest (clergy) on the one side and political power on the other when he was describing the position of religion in North America. It has not been the experience of Islam. In the Muslim societies, according to Berkes, the basic conflict is not necessarily between religion and the world, but is often between the forces of tradition, which tend to promote the domination of religion and sacred law, and the forces of

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley, vol. 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 308-310; Sheila McDonough, "Typologies of Religion and State." in Tarek Mitri, ed., *Religion, Law and Society: A Christian-Muslim Discussion* (Geneva: WCC. Publications; Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing Co., 1995), 6-7.

² See Zakaria, *The Struggle within Islam*, 6-20; Mushir-ul-Haq. *Islam in Secular India* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study. 1972). 4-21; Muhammad Munit, *From Jinnah to Zia* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd., 1980).

change. Such a struggle can take place, in his view, in a society where there is no organized church authority. And, in its formal doctrine, Islam has no clergy, even forbids Muslims to have such kind of class. Therefore, the concepts of secularism and secularization could not be applied completely in Muslim society.¹

It follows, even though a secular state and society is not necessarily secularist in the sense of a state embodying an ideology hostile to religion, many Muslims still cannot accept the idea of a secular state. For example, Kemal A. Faruki, after giving a historical sketch of the development of the idea of the secular state in Western societies, maintains that Islam is a secular religion if the word secular was used to indicate concern with worldly problems. However, he rejects the other meaning of secularism which suggests the separation of spiritual and temporal affairs, as well as the superiority of the temporal. Similarly, Fazlur Rahman, although not explicitly mentioning the term secularism, also expresses such kind of rejection. It appears that their rejection is based on two reasons. First, a secular society seems to relativize moral ideas of right and wrong which are derived from religion and to subordinate them to other considerations.² Second, a secular state is "neutral" in the sense that it will not interfere in promoting moral ideas of right and wrong. Consequently, this kind of attitude will make goodness exist at the individual level but may compromise it at the

¹ Berkes, *The Development of Secularism*. 5-8. See Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism. Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge. 1992; rep. 1993), 8. Gellner says that "It does not officially separate church from society, any more than it formally separates church from state. It does not possess, as some other civilizations have been said to possess, an exemplary centre holding up the Ideal to man, whether in a political or a religious court. If anyone in practice possess such a role within Islam, it is the scholars, the theologians-jurists, the 'Ulamā'. But they do not constitute a sacramentally segregated caste or stratum: they can only claim scholarship, familiarity with the scripturally recorded social/legal ideal, and hence the ability and will to practice and implement it, and no more. As for political authority, it is charged with enforcing divine law, rather than specifically or paradigmatically exemplifying it, let alone creating it. It must observe it, as must others, but it does not inherently constitute either its source or its norm." Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994). 16-17.

² Faruki is fiercely against the subordination of morality to any other consideration such as the nation-state. This is in fact, according to him, "the inevitable result when loyalty to nationalism is placed superior to loyalty to the moral principles which come from religion." Faruki, *Islamic Constitution*, 85.

collective level with expediency and other extraneous considerations.¹

In addition, the social problems and moral confusion faced by secular Western societies at present may enforce the Muslim rejection of the concept of a secular state. Moreover, some observations by contemporary Western historians were also used to strengthen their rejection. One of these Western historians is Arnold J. Toynbee, possibly the most eminent of modern Western historians, who describes the problems besetting modern Western life as follows: "... our own Western post-Christian secular civilization might at best be a superfluous repetition of the pre-Christian Graeco-Roman one, and at worst a pernicious back-sliding from the path of spiritual progress. In our Western world of to-day, the worship of Leviathan—the self-worship of the tribe—is a religion to which all of us pay some measure of allegiance; and this tribal religion is, of course, sheer idolatry. Communism which is another of our latter-day religions, is, I think, a leaf taken from the book of Christianity—a leaf torn out and misread. Democracy is another leaf from the book of Christianity, which has also, I fear, been torn out and, while perhaps not misread has certainly been a half emptied of meaning by being divorced from its Christian context and secularized; and we have obviously, for a number of generations past, been living on spiritual capital, I mean clinging to Christian practice without possessing the Christian belief—and practice unsupported by belief is a wasting asset, as we have suddenly discovered to our dismay, in this generation."²

Asad was born and raised in that kind of environment in Europe. Therefore, in describing his European socio-cultural situation he arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Toynbee. He writes as follows: "The opening decades of the twentieth century stood in the

¹ Rahman believes that it is necessary to create effective institutions, a government and state, which shall constitute the proper instrument for the implementation of social values and ideals. The collective institution of the society, i.e. the government, according to him, has the right and duty to constantly watch, give direction to, and actually mould the social fabric. Moreover, the state is to be the organization to which the Muslim *Ummah* would entrust the task of executing its will. Fazlur Rahman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan." *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (June 1967): 103-104 and 107; Fazlur Rahman, "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 1967): 205.

² Arnold Toynbee, "Christianity and Civilization," in *Civilization on Trial and the World and the West*. (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1965), 207.

sign of a spiritual vacuum. All the ethical valuations to which Europe have been accustomed for so many centuries had become amorphous under the terrible impact of what had happened between 1914 and 1918, and no new set of values was yet anywhere in sight. A feeling of brittleness and insecurity was in the air—a presentiment of social and intellectual upheavals that made one doubt whether there could ever again be any permanency in man's thoughts and endeavours. Everything seemed to be flowing in a formless flood, and the spiritual restlessness of youth could nowhere find a foothold. In the absence of any reliable standards of morality, nobody could give us young people satisfactory answer to the many questions that perplexed us."¹

Concerning moral relativism he states: "In the general process of dissolution of established social mores that followed the Great War, many restraints between the sexes had been loosened. What happened was, I think, not so much a revolt against the strait-lacedness of the nineteenth century as, rather, a passive rebound from a state of affairs in which certain moral standards, had been deemed eternal and unquestionable: a swinging of the pendulum from yesterday's comforting belief in the continuity of man's upward progress to the bitter disillusionment of Spengler, to Nietzsche's moral relativism, and to the spiritual nihilism fostered by psychoanalysis. Looking backward on those early postwar years, I feel that the young men and women who spoke and wrote with so much enthusiasm about 'the body's freedom' were very far indeed from the ebullient spirit of *Pan* they so often invoked: their raptures were too self-conscious to be exuberant, and too-easy going to be revolutionary. Their sexual relations had, as a rule, something casual about them—a certain matter-of-fact blandness which often led to promiscuity."²

Given this historical background one can understand why Asad rejects the secular state. It also appears that he has a great deal of apprehension concerning the fact that in a modern secular state there is no stable norm by which to judge between good and evil, right and wrong, and where the only possible criterion is the "nation's interest". For him, it became evident that the contemporary Western political systems base their conception of right and wrong on nothing but people's changeable and continuously changing material preferences. In the modern secular state, he thus concluded, "the term 'right' and

¹ Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, (Lahore: Maktaba Jawahar ul uloom, n.d.), 57.

² Asad, *The Road to Makkah*, 59.

'wrong' have no real validity of their own but are merely convenient fictions, fashioned exclusively by time and socio-economic circumstances." In his view, religion alone can provide a permanent, absolute moral law in order for a nation or community to know and gain unity and happiness.¹

Asad's belief in the supremacy of the *Shari'ah* is in accordance with traditional Islamic political thought as already explained in Chapter II. Therefore, for him the Islamic polity is under the ultimate sovereignty of God. In practical terms, however, Divine authority means the *Shari'ah* which in turn sets certain limits on the legislative authority in the Islamic state, regulates the behavior and authority of rulers, and protects the interests of their subjects. The recognition of the sovereignty of God, makes it incumbent upon the believers to follow His lead by complying with the *Shari'ah* instructions. This submission to God's sovereignty undoubtedly imposes restrictions upon individual and communal rights that are fundamental attributes of popular sovereignty and an integral component of his model of the *Shari'ah* state. It is argued, however, that such restrictions on the rights of the individual do not necessarily make the Islamic state authoritarian. Asad, for example, lists two reasons demonstrating the unauthoritarian character of the Islamic state: first the role of the *Ummah*. In Islamic political thought, as already explained in Chapter II, the *Ummah* or the community of believers, along with the *Shari'ah* is the source of political power. He maintains that "the principle of 'popular consent' presupposes that the government as such comes into existence on the basis of people's free choice and is fully representative of this choice."² He argues, however, that whenever Muslims speak of the "will of the people" in the context of Islamic political thought, they should not substitute for the un-Islamic autocracy of their past centuries the equally un-Islamic concept of unrestricted sovereignty on the part of the community as a whole.³

As a comparison, Fazlur Rahman, in a different line of argument, illustrates a similar view to that of Asad. Rahman maintains that the state organization, in Islam receives its mandate from the people, that is the Muslim Community. Therefore, he argues, it is necessarily democratic. And, in accordance with traditional Islamic political thought, he conceives that there will always be a group of people which has accepted to implement the will of God as revealed in

¹ See Asad, *State and Government*, 5-6.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 37.

³ Asad, *Ibid.*; 38.

the Qur'an and whose model in history was created by the Prophet.¹ It seems that Rahman's recognition of democracy should not be equated with a wholesome acceptance of democracy as it exists and functions in the West. With various arguments other Muslim thinkers too such as Muhammad Iqbal, Ayatullah Khomeini, and 'Ali Shari'ati do not accept modern Western democratic principles as a whole, instead, they embrace "Islamic democracy".² Iqbal, for instance, praises Islamic democracy for being based on equality, and criticizes modern Western democracy for being "... a system where people are counted but not weighed."³

The second reason is the nature of the *Shari'ah*. The *Shari'ah*, according to Asad, for the most part, embodies a set of general principles and, as such, is subject to interpretation. Because under the supervision of and in compliance with the *Shari'ah* the community still maintains broad discretion in decision-making.⁴ He justifies his opinion by claiming the support of the Companions of the Prophet and of outstanding jurists, in particular Ibn Hāzīm. Through the exercise of *ijtihad*, necessary, additional legislation can and must be provided "in consonance with the spirit of Islam".⁵ He would occasionally, therefore,

¹ Rahman, "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State," 205.

² Mehran Tamadonfar, *The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership: Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Pragmatism*. Westview Special Studies on the Middle East (Boulder, San Francisco, & London: Westview Press, 1989), 40-41.

³ Freeland Abbot, "View of Democracy and the West," in Hafeez Malik, ed., *Iqbal; Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), 175; See also Fazlur Rahman, "Some Aspects of Iqbal's Political Theory," *Studies in Islam* 5 (April-July 1968): 165.

⁴ See Asad, *State and Government*, 23.

⁵ For example, 'Umar's establishment of the *diwan*, or treasury office, after a Persian model, or his prohibiting warriors from Arabia to acquire landed property in the newly conquered territories. These cases are differently interpreted. Asad said that these cases were examples of administrative and legislative enactments which were neither directly nor indirectly derived from the Qur'an or *Sunnah* but from purely commonsense considerations of governmental efficiency and public interest and in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Meanwhile An-Na'im interprets these cases as clear and strong precedents from the earliest times of Islam that policy considerations may justify applying a rule derived through even if that required overriding clear and definite texts of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as long as the outcome of such *ijtihad* is consistent with the essential message of Islam. Asad did not say that 'Umar's *ijtihad* overrode the clear and definite texts of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (*nusus*), but An-Na'im did. Asad, *State and Government*, 14 and 23-24; An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*. 28-29; Rosenthal, *National*

refer to legislations of the past, arrived at by *ijtihad*, and stress the temporary character of all such legislations since they were surely bound by the special circumstances of their time and place. They were, nevertheless, always subject to the authority of the irrevocable, unchangable *Shari'ah*. Moreover, he believes that the ordinances of the Divine Law conform to "the real nature of man and the genuine requirements of human society at any time".¹ Similarly, he quotes a Qur'anic verse² in support of his contention that "the Law-Giver has conceded to us, within this area, an 'open road' (*minhāj*) for temporal legislation which would cover the contingencies deliberately left untouched by the *nusūs* of Qur'an and *Sunnah*."³

We deal now with the position of non-Muslims in the Islamic state as Asad envisions it. No doubt this issue is one of most delicate problems for modern Islamic political thought, and the object of criticism from non-Muslims especially from contemporary Western countries. The criticism often centers on the civil and political rights of non-Muslims as members of religious minorities. Non-Muslims, it was argued, cannot have complete equality within an Islamic state, though assured that their basic religious freedom is guaranteed and their personal laws recognized. The status of non-Muslims (*ahl al-dhimmah*)⁴ is entitled under traditional Islamic political theories to protection of one's person and property and to practice one's religion in private in exchange for payment of poll tax (*jizyah*).⁵ Meanwhile, Asad relates the payment of *jizyah* by non-Muslims with the duty of citizens of the Islamic state to take arms in defensive war. Therefore, the non-Muslim citizens can share with the Muslims the duty to take up arms in defence of the Islamic state if they wish. However, they are entitled to exemption on grounds of conscience, in which case they must pay the *jizyah*.⁶ This is a

State, 126.

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 14; Rosenthal, *National State*, 126.

² "For every one of you We have ordained a Divine Law and an open road." (Q. 5:48).

³ Asad, *State and Government*, 15; Rosenthal, *National State*, 126-127.

⁴ *Ahl al-dhimmah* is the people with whom a compact or covenant has been made; the free non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim government, who pay a poll-tax for which the Muslims are responsible for their security and freedom and toleration. *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1984 ed., s. v. "dzimmah," by E. W. Lane.

⁵ See Abdelwahab El-Affendi, *Who Needs an Islamic State?* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), 65-66; Mitri, "Introduction," in Tarek Mitri, ed., *Religion, Law, and Society*, vii; An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 89.

⁶ Asad, *State and Government*, 70-75. Thus, according to Asad, *jizyah* is no more

significant reversal of the mainstream conservative position.¹

Asad tries not to discriminate against non-Muslim citizens and declares that the only post to be reserved for a Muslim is that of head of state. This means that non-Muslim citizens can attain all other positions. It also appears that he realizes that this demand may still cause some apprehension inasmuch as it would seem to imply a discrimination between the Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. He, therefore, emphasizes that Muslims must be able to show that the sociopolitical scheme of Islam aims at justice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and that in the Muslim endeavor to set up a truly Islamic state they are moved by moral consideration alone.²

Nevertheless, he frankly admits the need to have a certain amount of differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims based on psychological and ideological reasons, otherwise, in his opinion, there can be no question of Muslims ever having an Islamic state or states in the sense envisaged in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.³ Asad, Parwez and

and no less than an "exemption tax" in lieu of military service and in compensation for the "covenant of protection" (*dhimmah*) accorded to such citizens by the Islamic state. There is classification of *ahl al-dhimmah* ("the people who are given covenant of protection"). All women, males who have not yet reached full maturity. Old men, all sick or crippled men, priests and monks, are exempted from the payment of *jizyah*. Only non-Muslims who—if they were Muslims, would be expected to serve in the armed forces of the state—are liable to the payment of *Jizyah* provided that they can easily afford it. Asad bases this classification on several Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. The term itself is derived from the verb *jaza*, "he rendered (something) as a satisfaction", or "as a compensation (in lieu of something else)". The term *jizyah* occurs in the Qur'an only once (9: 29), but its meaning and purpose have been fully explained in many authentic Traditions. Meanwhile the term, *dhimmah* occurs twice in the Qur'an (9: 8 and 10). *The Message of the Qur'an*, 257: n. 13 and 15.; 262: n. 43.

¹ The mainstream conservative position simply disqualifies non-Muslims rather than exempting them from having to fight in defence of themselves. Exemption, implies request, or at least the choice of the person being so exempt, whereas according to the conservative position non-Muslims have no choice in accepting the status of being defended by the Muslims in exchange for payment of *jizyah*. See An-Na'im, *Toward the Islamic Reformation*, 89. For an orthodox or conservative position see Mawdudi. *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, 292-321; Ahmed, *The Concept of an Islamic State*, 87, 92, and 101-103.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 99.

³ See Asad, *State and Government*, 40-41. One can argue that even in some states which seemingly secular, like the United Kingdom (Britain), they too require that its monarch to be the defender of the Protestant faith. See Zakaria, *The*

Mawdudi hold similar view that the *dhimmis* are to follow their own laws, granted full autonomy, and entitled to the same civic rights that the Muslims enjoy. Mawdudi further divides non-Muslims in an Islamic state into three types: Contractees, the Conquered, and Residents.¹

The status of non-Muslims also comes to attention when Asad expounds the term "community" and the elective nature of the chief executive and the legislature. According to Asad, the Legislative Assembly, to which he gives the traditional Muslim name of *majlis al-shūra*, must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women. Rosenthal deduces that, by this meaning, Asad excludes the non-Muslims from both voting for and sitting in the Legislative Assembly. According to the former, this belief is contrary to Asad's insistence on the fundamental Islamic principle of the equality of all human beings, and is not only a form of inevitable differentiation as he admits but of discrimination as well. The reason for Rosenthal's statement is that minorities are as much, if not more, affected by decisions concerning public matters as the majority.²

That it is also a form of discrimination appears when he talks of broad Muslim suffrage. There is no mention of universal adult franchise which might also include non-Muslims as active participants in the political process, although he recognizes the right to form political parties. Asad, however, seems to cry to minimize discrimination against religious minorities which the 'Ulama' want to extend to all aspects of societal life.³

Although Asad as far as possible tries to minimize

Struggle within Islam, 20. This also applies to the Spanish monarchy. Similarly, the constitution of Republic of Argentina also rules that the president should be a Roman Catholic.

¹ Maududi, ... *Islamic Law*, 289-291, 295-321; G. A. Parwez, *Islam: A Challenge to Religion* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1989), 276.

² See Rosenthal, *National State*, 131; Asad, *State and Government*, 47-48.

³ For comparison, the traditional 'ulamā' see the *Shari'ah* as dictating the creation of a state for Muslims as the sole citizens, with non-Muslims having no political rights. Mawdudi accepts the first part of the above proposition but allow non-Muslims very limited participation in policies. Parwez, Hakim, and Zafar also see the state as only for Muslims, but whereas Hakim sees a role for non-Muslims in policy implementation. Parwez and Zafar do not discuss the status of non-Muslims. Javid Iqbal seems to believe in Muslims as the primary nation, with non-Muslims as part of a broader Pakistani nation. Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 87. 101-103, 126-127. 132, 137. 141-142; An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation* 38.

discrimination against non-Muslims and to be fairer to them compared to traditionalists and fundamentalists, he is unable to give Islamically new and fresh solution that suits to the present stage of human development. It happens, perhaps, because he fails to apply completely his hermeneutical method and legal theory of considering fully the entire historical context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and of the spirit of Islam. While in other cases, that is concerning punishment for stealing and position of woman. Asad succeeds relatively to apply his hermeneutical method and legal theory, in the problem of non-Muslim citizens his solution seems to fall short of responding to the requirements of time and changing social conditions.¹ Moreover, Asad's *ijtihad* has its limitations, because of his notion of *nass* i.e., a statement plainly, or explicitly, declared or made manifest by God (in the Qur'an) and His Apostle (in the *Hadith*). He considers that the *nass* is so self-expressive and unequivocal that no attempt at arbitrary interpretation can change its purport. It is therefore follows that any discriminatory rule that is based on an explicit and definite text (*nass*) for Asad is not open completely to reform through *ijtihad*.² Asad's notion of *nass* then become impediment for him to achieve the moral and political objective of removing all discrimination against non-Muslims in Islamic Law. It

¹ It is unfortunate that Asad who understands well Islamic history does not try to notice different arrangement which made by the Prophet with non-Muslims and the treatment made by him after some Jewish tribes violated the Constitution, or his successors (the caliphs) when the Arab-Muslims conquered vast territories under Persian and Byzantium empires. Prophet Muhammad established the first Islamic state in Medina through an alliance between the migrants and their supporters in the City, together with the Christian and Jewish tribes of the area. During that initial period, Christians and Jews, known as *Ahl al-Kitab*, People of the Book or Followers of Earlier Revelation, were treated with tolerance and respect as equal partners in the Constitution of Medina which regulated their relationship with the Muslims. A new principle came into play, however, with the expedition against Khaybar in 628. The Jews who violated the Constitution, were not expelled but allowed to go on cultivating on condition that they paid a proportion of their produce and *jizyah* (poll-tax) to the Muslims. A similar principle was followed under Abu Bakr and Umar. Asad seems to ignore those different and changing historical circumstances. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought: The Basic Concepts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968; paperback ed. 1987). 4-14 and 46-52.

² See Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, trans., and intr. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 22-23.

seems that the status of non-Muslims and woman, still constitutes the problem for a modern Islamic political theory that is, how it has to deal with international human rights standards which clearly say that the principle of equality is not compatible with a regime of discrimination against religious minorities.¹

Concerning the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states, Asad holds that Islam forbids wars of aggression and insists on the purely defensive character of *jihad* war, i.e. it is only permissible in self-defence. On his discussion of *jihad*, Asad quotes the verse 2:190: "And fight in God's cause against those wage war against you, but do not commit aggression—for, verily, God does not love aggressors." This verse and the following verse, according to him, lay down unequivocally that only self-defence (in the widest sense of the word) makes war permissible for Muslims.² The traditionalists, on the

¹ See Rosenthal, *National State*, 132; Asad, *State and Government*, 47-48; Ann Elizabeth Meyer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics*, (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press; London: Pinter Publishers, 1995), 80; El-Affendi, *Who Needs an Islamic State?*, 67-68.

² Asad, *State and Government*, 72-75. We would like to examine further Asad's interpretation of Qur'anic verses regarding relationship with non-Muslims. In interpreting Q. 3: 28, Asad comments that the believers not to take those who deny the truth for their allies in preference to the believers in cases where the interests of those "deniers of the truth" clash with the interests of believers. It means if there is no such a clash, it is allowed for a Muslim group or power to form an alliance with "those who deny the truth", above all if it is intended to protect Muslims. Regarding the deeper implications of the term *awliya'* (allies) he says that it does not indicate in that context merely political alliances, but more than anything else a "moral alliance," that is, to an adoption of their way of life in preference to the way of life of the believers, in the hope of being "honoured", or accepted as equals, by the former. Asad argues that since an imitation of the way of life of confirmed unbelievers must obviously conflict with the moral principles demanded by true faith, it unavoidably leads to a gradual abandonment of those principles. He moreover says that friendly relations with unbelievers who are not hostile to the Muslim community are permissible, and even desirable. It is obvious Asad does not interpret the verse and other verses with similar issues such as 4: 144, 8: 72-73, 9: 23 and 71, and 60: 1, with the use of force against non-Muslims as were understood and applied by the early Muslims. It seems that Asad sees these verses as having provided the necessary psychological support for the survival and cohesion of a vulnerable community of Muslims in a hostile and violent social and physical environment in Medina. See *The Message of the Qur'an*. 41: n. 167; 70: n. 19 and 20; 131: n. 154; 132: n. 159; 252-253: n. 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, and 82; 259: n. 31; 272: n. 99; 855: n. 1, 2, and 3; An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 144.

contrary, see peace with the non-Muslim world as temporary and confrontation as unavoidable. Mawdudi sees the possibility of negotiating peace with non-Muslims while admitting the inevitability of confrontation if the *Shari'ah* is the law of the land. Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, Khalifa Abdul Hakim, and Javed Iqbal seem to believe, whether expressly or by implication, the peace with the non-Muslim world is desirable, but they differ on whether confrontation is likely. To Hakim, ideological confrontation with atheism and polytheism is necessary, a position which is hard to reconcile with his view that peace is desirable. Parwez does not address the question, but it seems that peace with non-Muslims follows from his general reasoning.¹

The position of women in Islam has aroused much interest in current developments. It is, undoubtedly, the growing strength of Islamist movements today, which urge the reinstatement of the laws and practices set forth in core Islamic discourses, made the discussion of the position of women in relation to Asad's political thought seem particularly urgent and relevant.² Given the prevailing marginality of Muslim women in politics and existing views which forbid women's socio-political participation, Asad's views on women's political participation seem quite liberal. This appears in his discussion of the election of members of the legislative assembly, of free and compulsory education—where women are explicitly mentioned—and of the election of head of state. He also suggests that the members of the *majlis* (the legislative assembly) should have, regardless of their gender, a good working knowledge of the *nusûs* of the Qur'an and that they are to be people of understanding and insight, aware of the sociological requirements of the community and worldly affairs in general. For him, education and maturity are indispensable qualifications for election to the *majlis al-shûra*. Also when illustrating the conditions for the position of head of state he mentions that that person must believe in the Divine origin of the *Shari'ah*, be a Muslim, possess honorable individual merits.

¹ Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 183-184; An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 38-39.

² Nikki R. Keddie, "Introduction: Deciphering Middle Eastern Women's History," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, ed., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 1-2; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 1-2; Mai Yamani, "Introduction," in Mai Yamani, ed., with Additional Editorial Assistance from Andrew Allen, *Feminism & Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1.

Asad precludes any considerations of race, family origin, or previous social status.¹ Moreover, he does not mention that the head of state should be a man nor that this office cannot be entrusted to a woman, as medieval Islamic political theorists did and traditional and fundamentalist 'ulama' do at the present time.² Asad, therefore, seems to believe that woman has equal political rights.³ Parwez, Hakim, and Javid Iqbal are in accord the opinion of Asad in allowing women participation in public life on an equal footing with men.⁴

Since Mu'āwiyah (r. 661-680 C. E.) installed himself as caliph, many Muslims have lived, and still live, under authoritarian regimes and unjust rulers who deny them freedom of speech, assembly and action. Muslim jurists, as already expounded in Chapter II, had recourse involuntarily to legitimistic and opportunistic theories for reasons of restoring and preserving the unity of Muslims. The 'Ulama' continued, on the one hand, to strenuously advocate absolute obedience even to unjust rulers and, on the other, to draw perfectionist pictures of an ideal caliph or ruler to ensure political stability. According to them, the other alternative was chaotic and unstable, thus Muslims with the help of the doctrine of predeterminism could do nothing religiously except obey their unjust and authoritarian rulers.⁵

Realizing those historical facts, Asad is strongly concerned with

¹ Asad, *State and Government*, 39-40, 45-48, and 87.

² See Maududi, *Islamic Law*, 282.

³ It is interesting to illustrate Asad's assessment of Islamic Law and Muslim attitudes towards women. He writes: "The freedom which Islamic Law accords to both men and women to contract or dissolve a marriage explains why it considers adultery one of the most heinous of crimes: for in the face of such latitude, no emotional or sensual entanglement can ever serve as an excuse. It is true that in the centuries of Muslim decline, social custom has often made it difficult for a woman to exercise her prerogative of divorce as freely as the Law-Giver had intended: for this, however, not Islam but custom is to blame— just as custom, and not Islamic Law, is to be blamed for the seclusion in which woman has been kept for so long in so many Muslim countries: for neither in the Koran nor in the life-example of the Prophet do we find any warrant for this practice, which later found its way into Muslim society from Byzantium." Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Makkah* (Lahore: Maktaba Jawahar ul uloom, n.d.), 284-285. This book was written around 1954.

⁴ Ahmed, *Islamic State*, 133, 137, and 144; Aa-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, 38.

⁵ Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), 92-94.

constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers of the various organs of the state. He therefore pays much attention to the necessity to control power, government by consent and council, the relationship between the executive and legislative, and the citizens and the government. He, for example, proposes a referendum to legally depose a ruler who governs in deliberate opposition to Islamic Law.¹

Asad's proposal to hold a referendum to depose a ruler shows clearly his tendency to have people control the powers of the ruler. He even emphasizes that Muslims should not substitute for the un-Islamic autocracy of their past centuries the equally un-Islamic concept of unrestricted sovereignty of the community as a whole. Moreover, he declares that the entire Muslim history could have taken a different course if 'Uthman (the third Caliph) had held himself bound (in the legal sense of the word) by the decisions of a properly constituted *majlis al-shura*.²

However, Asad also emphasizes obedience to the *amir*, based on a number of "political" *hadiths*, in consonance with the principle of communal unity insisted upon so frequently in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. This acceptance of political *hadiths* has invited much criticism which declares that by using this kind of *hadith* uncritically, his theory on the principle of obedience to the *amir* is unacceptable and seems to contradict his views on the necessity to get rid of authoritarian regimes.³ One has to remember that Asad is a *muhaddith* (one who believes in and defends all the "authentic" *hadiths*).⁴ By using these "authentic" political *hadiths*, which are contradictory to one another, as one of the main sources of his theory, Asad has made a definite formal confusion as

¹ Asad, *State and Government*; 36, 38, 43-44, 80.

² See Asad, *State and Government*, 38, 56, and 80.

³ See Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Islam as the Basis of State: A Study of the Islamic Political Ideas as Reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates in Indonesia," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1983), 219.

⁴ Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328 C. E.) encouraged Muslims to rediscover the original teachings of Islam and to apply individual judgment (*ijtihad*) in the interpretation of religious doctrine, and brought forth powerful arguments in vindicating religious values. His political doctrine was not, however, necessarily free from certain basic limitations due to his uncritical acceptance of political *hadiths* which made him declare that the *Imam* who is to be obeyed is the one who has power, regardless of whether he is just or unjust. See Manzoor Ahmad Hanifi, *A Surrey of Muslim Institutions and Culture*, rev. ed. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1980), 78; Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 93-94.

well.¹

Asad's Islamic legal theory is challenging because of his historical and critical approaches. Furthermore, his proposal that the *majlis al-shura* elect a small panel of scholars is equally worthy of appreciation.² His notions on differentiating between universal and particular ordinances, and on considering the entire—socio-cultural and historical—context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, could result in liberal and unrigid interpretations and applications of Islamic law. One may, however, argue that Asad's emphasis on the actual—those based on clear instructions in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*—divine laws (*nass*) which include the harsh criminal code, arises confusions and contradictions, and seems to limit this liberal tendency. Nevertheless, it could be equally argued that since he always refers to the *spirit* (not the form) of Islam, of Islamic law, or of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* in his discussion of how the community enacts relevant and detailed legislation through the exercise of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), it seems that it provide a safeguard against legal and social rigidity, and it has, at least, potentialities to allow a more liberal interpretation of Islamic law.³ In addition, his suggestion

¹ Maarif, "Islam as the Basis of State." 220.

² Asad's proposal is similar to that of Iqbal's. In Iqbal's view the transfer of the power of *ijtihad* from the individual representatives of schools to a Muslim legislative assembly which, in view of the growth of opposing sects, is the only possible form of *ijma'* that can take place in modern times. Allama Muhammad Iqbal. *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam* (Lahore: Dr. Javid Iqbal & Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968), 173-174.

³ That Asad is not literalist is evident in his explanation of the verse 5: 38 concerning Qur'anic punishment for stealing. According to Asad, the punishment could not be applied unless every member of the Islamic society—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—is given his or her right to protection (in every sense of the word) by the community as a whole. Based on his understanding of Qur'anic ordinances as well as the Prophetic injunctions forthcoming from authentic Traditions, Asad shows that every citizen is entitled to a share in the community's economic resources and, thus, to the enjoyment of social security. Asad says: "In other words, he or she must be assured of an equitable standard of living *commensurate with the resources at the disposal of the community.*" He emphasizes if the society is unable to fulfill its duties with regard to every one of its members, it has no right to invoice the full sanction of criminal law (*hadd*) against the individual transgressor, but must confine itself to milder forms of administrative punishment. He praises the Caliph 'Umar who, in accordance with this principle, waived the *hadd* of hand-cutting in a period of famine which afflicted Arabia during his reign. He concludes, "that the cutting-off of a hand in punishment for theft is applicable

to invite criticism and suggestions from other Muslim countries, in a kind of corporate-global interpretation or communicative reasons, toward suggested legal codification demonstrates his open-mindedness and unrigid and flexible attitude.

His notion of the need to consider fully the entire historical context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and his reference to the spirit of Islam is similar or comparable to the hermeneutical method employed by Fazlur Rahman in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Rahman's method of Qur'anic hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of its message in such a way as to enable those who have faith in it and want to live by its guidance—in both their individual and collective lives—to do so coherently and meaningfully. The process of interpretation proposed by him consists of a double movement, from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present. According to him, the Qur'an is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia, particularly to the problems of the commercial Meccan society of his day. The first movement consists of two steps, where in the first step one must understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it responds. The second step is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral social objectives that can be "distilled" from specific texts in light of the socio-historical background and the often-stated *rationes legis*. The second movement, then, is to be from this general view to the

only within the context of an already-existing, fully functioning social security scheme, and in no other circumstances." See Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 149-150: n. 48. Another example is his interpretation of the stipulation that the evidence of two women are equal to that of one man, as required by the Qur'an (2: 282). Asad's interpretation clearly takes the historical context into consideration and implies that the derived meaning is conditional and temporary, not literal and permanent i.e. it could change according to the requirements of time and the changing social conditions. Asad's comments are as follows: "The stipulation that two women may be substituted for one male witness does not imply any reflection on woman's moral or intellectual capabilities: it is obviously due to the fact that, as a rule, women are less familiar with business procedures than men and, therefore, more liable to commit mistakes in this respect." Although he avoids to make a clear conclusion, it could be concluded, had the circumstances changed, that is woman as familiar as man, or even in the modern time many women are much more familiar with business or law such as business-woman and lawyers, the stipulation would have changed. See *The Message of the Qur'an*, 63: n. 273.

specific view that is to be formulated and realized. In other words, the general has to be embodied in the present, concrete socio-historical context.¹

Because of Asad's modern historical and critical approach and his plan to summon a new assembly for a codification of *Shari'ah* ordinances, the feasibility of his proposal will depend on the support it will find among like-minded Muslims believing in the greatness of original Islam as well as modern-educated Muslims. The established experts—the '*ulamā*'— could not, however, be expected to support such a drastic break with the traditional system. Nevertheless, Asad hopes that with this codification the dissension and confusion existing among Muslims as to what constitutes the sociopolitical teaching of Islam on which they ought to model their Islamic state will be resolved. In practical terms this means that Asad aspires to bring about the rebirth of ideal Islam and to show the world Islam's moral superiority. But, it is difficult to establish ideal Islam, since a Muslim thinker like Asad has to face two obstacles at the same time: the power and influence of the conservative '*Ulamā*' on the one hand, and the current secular tendencies in Muslim societies, on the other.²

Throughout his model, Asad is strongly concerned with constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers of the various organs of the state. This concern is no doubt encouraging because it indicates a commitment to constitutionalism. But his model of the *Shari'ah* state is insufficient to achieve full constitutionalism, since it does not completely apply the principle of the equality of all citizens before the law. It, as already analyzed above, disqualifies non-Muslims from holding any office involving the interpretation and application of the *Shari'ah* and the office of head of state. This lack of Asad's model of the *Shari'ah* state laid on his failure to apply comprehensively his own

¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982; Paperback ed., 1984). 4-7.

² See Rosenthal, *National State*, 136. In his writing of the need for Muslims to think anew about Islam in order to give them precise directives for the formation of their society and to translate these directives into practice, Asad criticizes the '*Ulamā*'. They, according to him, were telling Muslims that in matters of religion independent thought is heresy, and the true Muslim is he who blindly repeats the formulas evolved in the olden days. See Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 11-14. Compare to Iqbal when he says that he did not see any reason why the '*Ulamā*' claim of finality of the popular schools of Islamic law. See Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, 168.

hermeneutical method and legal theory. His view that it is in full keeping with the spirit of the *Shari'ah* if the constitution of an Islamic state would explicitly disqualify desirous self-canvassing person of being appointed to an administrative post or of being elected to a representative assembly from being elected or appointed, also compromised individual and communal rights which are fundamental attributes of popular sovereignty that constitutes one important principles of relating to the nature of his model of the *Shari'ah* state. One can expect, however, that Asad's scheme of the Islamic state allows for human, social and intellectual evolution and thus avoid rigidity in the concept of Islamic political law, and considerable scope for a just and moral society and relatively and potentially more liberal interpretation of Islam.¹

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study of Muhammad Asad's political thought presents us with several conclusions; all of which must be highlighted within the sphere of Islamic political thought. Therefore, let us first summarize the origin and development of Islamic political thought in early and medieval Islam, and, second, the development of modern Islamic political thought. From our previous discussion it could be seen that Islamic political thought in early Islam focused mainly on religio-political issues surrounding the question of the election and deposition of the Caliph or Imam. This issue dominated the scene because soon after the death of the prophet Muhammad, contemporary Muslims were confronted with the question of succession to his position as leader of the community. Hence various politico-religious schools came into existence and formulated different views concerning this issue. Ultimate authority, however, according to all these parties, belonged to God, whose sovereignty extends over the whole universe. In practical terms, Divine authority means the *Shari'ah*. It sets certain limits on the legislative authority in the Islamic polity; regulates the behavior and authority of rulers; and protects the interests of their subjects. Together with the *Shari'ah*, the *Ummah*, i.e. the Muslim community or the

¹ Cf. Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, The Center for Middle Eastern Studies. The University of Texas at Austin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982; paperback ed., 1991). 110 and 205.

community of believers, is a source of political power. Indeed, the *Ummah* lies at the core of the Islamic political concept. Moreover, public opinion or *ijma'* (consensus of the community), as a source of law, endows the community as a whole with political sovereignty in "their own right." In later periods, however especially during and after the Umayyad caliphate, this theory increasingly served as doctrinal justification for contemporary politics which became more and more separated from the early exemplar. The ruler's behavior and authority were no longer regulated by the *Shari'ah* and the political power was not based on public opinion but almost completely on force.

The three major streams or groups of Islamic political thought in medieval Islam tended to describe and grapple with the contemporary discrepancy between the ideal form of the state and the reality of Muslim political affairs. Their debates centered round the caliphate, and recognized the authority of *Shari'ah* as supreme. Nevertheless, the decline of the Abbasid caliphate which was characterized by constant struggles between the caliph and the sultan (or *amir*) for effective exercise of authority and power, tended to increase the divergence between the real and the ideal. Unfortunately, when these struggles were taking place the caliphate had not only diverged from the path of the *Shari'ah*, but it became increasingly difficult to define and legitimize the relationship between the caliph and the sultan. Consequently, the Islamic political thinkers tried, on the one hand, to keep faith with the ideal caliphate and its sole supreme authority, while on the other hand, they grappled with the reality that effective power in medieval Islam was in the hands of sultans and amirs. The scholars, nevertheless, managed to legitimize the caliphate of their time, even though it did not fulfill the ideal requirements.

Ibn Taymiyah and, especially Ibn Khaldun, were more realistic in their political theories. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyah ignores the current political struggles and tries, by concentrating on the *Shari'ah*, to create the conditions necessary for the reconstitution of a Muslim community guided by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. He also rejects the theory of political universalism so central to Muslim political thinking from the time of al-Ash'ari onwards. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun, although paying lip-service to the classical theory of the *imamah* or *khilafah*, accepts on the basis of historical evidence that the Muslim state had gradually metamorphosed into a form of temporal authority. Therefore, more than one polity may be found in the Muslim world and all such polities, so long as they base their rule upon compliance with the revealed law,

are both legitimate and doctrinally acceptable.

Islamic political thought in the modern period is part and parcel of Islamic responses in general toward European domination, and a response toward cultural, political and economic problems facing Muslim societies. Nevertheless, it can also be said that modern Islamic political thought is still entrenched in previous political theories. Modern Muslim scholars, such as Rashid Riḍā, do not seem to have fully accepted the concept of the nation-state and have generally withheld doctrinal recognition and legitimation, although tacitly accepting the reality. Riḍā's model of a modern Islamic state, in which its main pivot is the supremacy of the *Shari'ah*, has been adopted by various Islamic movement seeking to establish Islamic states throughout the Muslim world. He reasserted the temporal as well as religious significance of the true Caliphate and demonstrated the fitness of the institution for the political requirements of the modern age. This model was opposed by 'Ali Abd al-Rāziq who held that the caliphate is not inherent in Islam and therefore not necessary, and argued for the separation between state and religion.

The Muslim encounter with the West resulted in the introduction and spread of, among others, nationalism among them. Indeed, there are differences between Arab nationalism before and after World War I. Before the War, the Arab idea of nationalism was mingled with the idea of Islamic unity, and Arab nationalism scarcely aimed beyond the rehabilitation of the Arab race in a multinational empire. After the War, however, with the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the gradual withering of the colonial system, an ideological controversy began among the Muslim intellectuals which is still continuing until the present. This controversy centered round the basic contradiction between nationalism as a time-bound set of principles related to the qualities and needs of a particular group of human beings, and Islam as an eternal, universalist message, drawing no distinction between its adherents except on the criterion of their piety. Under the impact of European ideas, Arab nationalism necessarily became liberal and almost secular in character, since it was reacting against the call for idea of the Islamic unity. Moreover, the controversy over the secularisation of the law and court procedure as well as the debate between "Islamist" and Westernised thinkers about what kind of state and laws Muslims should adopt also developed.

The experience of Iranian Muslims was quite different from that of their Arab counterparts. Iranian nationalism has been less concerned

with the problem of nationhood than with that of freedom. Indeed, only marginal references are to be found in the relevant writings of nineteenth-century Iranian intellectuals on such questions as the oneness of the Iranian nation, the constituents of its identity, and the conflict between Iran's pre-Islamic culture and her Islamization. Instead there are persistent demands for democracy, parliamentarism, and the rule of law; criticism of the existing state of affairs; and wistful comparison of modernization with backwardness. Hence the Shi'i religious writers scarcely felt the necessity to pronounce their views on nationalism. However, following the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Khan in 1925, opposition was expressed by the '*ulama*' toward nationalism. Moreover, Reza Khan Shah's systematic policy of cultural nationalism, and glorification of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization at the expense of Islamic values and symbols, naturally made opposition to nationalism a criterion of doctrinal rectitude.

Pakistan came into being through a crisis of cultural identity and the development of a national consciousness manifested in the Indian Muslim struggle against British colonialism and Hindu domination. In fact, Pakistan was born through a multiplicity of factors: cultural, social and political. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah are considered to be the most important contributors for the creation of Pakistan, the first state in contemporary history to be established solely for the sake of Islam. But, Pakistan meant different things to different people, it is thus a matter of consequence that after its establishment the various expectations generated considerable ideological debates. Since Pakistan was a confessional state, the government, on the one hand, was under pressure from the '*ulama*' and other doctrinally-minded Muslims to give some tangible form to the state's professed "Islamic way of life", including the composition of an Islamic constitution. The Western-oriented elites, on the other hand, were rather evasive concerning the "Islamic" character of the state, probably because of their concern that their own titles would be dubious in an Islamic state. As a result there were conflicting theories concerning the nature or character of an Islamic state. In this context, Muhammad Asad's work, on the principles of state and government in Islam bears a significant relevance.

Among those who participated in the debates surrounding the character of the state, particularly those who wanted to give Pakistan a distinctly Islamic character, is Muhammad Asad who belonged to the modernist or liberal camp. The proponents of this camp believed in the

idea of a *Shari'ah* state and assumed that Islam sanctions a distinct type of state whose law is to be the *Shari'ah* with room for contemporary human discretion in the interpretation and application of which in Asad's opinion, the purpose behind the creation of Pakistan is to establish a truly Islamic polity and to apply the tenets of Islam in practical life. Therefore, for him Islam should serve as a guide and inspiring ideal as well as the rule of life, i.e. the constitution of the state whose law is to be the *Shari'ah*. In other words, a state can become truly Islamic only by virtue of a conscious application of the socio-political tenets of Islam in the life of the nation, and by an incorporation of those tenets in the basic constitution of the country. Thus, the Islamic state is to be a vehicle through which the Islamic moral values can be enforced in the socio-political life of the *Ummah*. This belief is not different from Ibn Taymiyah's, Fazlur Rahman's, Mawdudi's as well as the statements of other Islamic thinkers. Furthermore, it is in the total agreement with the standard of Islamic political theory. It is also the central theme of Asad's political treatise.

In Asad's view, the Qur'an and *Sunnah* do not lay down any specific form of state, nor does the *Shari'ah* illustrate a detailed constitutional theory, rather any form of an Islamic state may be acceptable so long as it is in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal *Shari'ah* rules relating to communal life. Following this argument, he criticized the notion prevailing among many Muslims, both in the past and the present, that there is but one form of state deserving the adjective "Islamic"—namely, the form manifested under the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. For Asad, there could be many forms for the Islamic state so long as they are in full agreement with the explicit, unequivocal ordinances of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. In other words, he does not rely on historical precedents as possible guides for his model of an Islamic state. Similarly, he argued that the supremacy of the *Shari'ah* and the authority of the *Ummah* to interpret and preserve the latter ensures the continuity and development of Islamic thought.

In this study we find that Asad, in accordance with the opinion of the majority of Muslim scholars, rejects the secular state. He argues that in a modern secular state there is no stable norm by which to judge between good and evil, and right and wrong. Rather, the only possible criterion in such a state is the nation's interest. Moreover, in a secular state, there is no objective scale of moral values. On the other hand, the purpose of an Islamic state is not self-determination for a racial or cultural entity but the establishment of Islamic law as a practical

proposition in human affairs. This is a clear rejection of the central idea of the modern national state with its separation of religion and politics. Asad also believed that a state built on the foundations of religion offers an infinitely better prospect of national happiness than a state founded upon the concept of a secular political organism. To achieve that condition, the religious doctrine on which such a state rests should, he argued, make full allowance, first, for human biological and social needs, and, second, for the law of historical and intellectual evolution to which human society as a whole is subject.

Interestingly, Asad called for the initiation of a fresh approach to Islamic law. He argued that by implementing *ijtihad* faithfully, Muslims would be able to achieve a renewal of Islam in an Islamic state. He also asserted that the real *Shari'ah* only consists of a small number of laws based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and is far more concise and very much smaller in volume than the legal structure that evolved through the *fiqh* of the various schools of Islamic law. This limited scope of the explicit ordinances contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (*nass*) was meant to provide a most essential, deliberate safeguard against legal and social rigidity. Therefore, it is reasonable, according to him, to assume that the Law-Giver never intended the *Shari'ah* to cover in detail all the conceivable exigencies of life. As a result of this line of argument, the concept of Islamic Law—especially with regard to public law—acquires once again that simplicity which had been envisaged for it by the Law-Giver but has subsequently been buried under many layers of conventional and frequently arbitrary interpretation.

Implementing his ideological plan in Pakistan is, needless to say, an impossible task since the simplicity of the Islam of the Prophet is not unconnected with the economic, social and cultural situation of seventh-century Arabia. Asad was well-aware of this fact and acknowledged the process of historical evolution that distinguished the era of the Prophet Muhammad from even that of the *al-khulafa' al-rāshidūn* (the Rightly-Guided Caliphs), in which some of whose legal enactments and administrative measures were neither directly nor indirectly derived from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, but, were nevertheless in conformity with the spirit of Islam.

In addition, Asad called for the formation of a new assembly which is to codify the actual (those based on clear instructions in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*) divine laws. Such an act obviously means a reliance on modern-educated Muslims, since the established expects—the '*ulamā*' could not be expected to support such a drastic break from the

traditional system. Asad's constitution allows no authority to the '*ulamā*' whatsoever. Instead, he gives the supreme Court sole jurisdiction in questions concerning the conformity or repugnancy of acts of the legislature to the *Shari'ah*.

Asad's model of *Shari'ah* state shows strong concern with constitutional questions relating to the nature and powers of the various organs of the state. Thus, he deals with issues such as government by consent and council and the relationship between the executive and the legislative and between citizens and government. In cases of disagreement between the *majlis* and the executive organ, fundamental differences are to be referred to a body of arbiters, who, after an impartial study of the problem, would decide which of the two conflicting views is closer to the spirit of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The same "impartial supreme tribunal" would have the power to veto legislation and administrative acts that go against the texts of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He also insisted on an interdependence between the Executive and the Legislative, since their independent existence and functioning would be against Islam. Likewise, he maintained that in a state subject to the authority of a Divine Law there can be no radical separation of the legislative and the executive organs of government. Relying on historical precedents, as well as the Qur'an and *Hadiths*, he argued that the leader is obliged to follow the decisions of the majority of his council, whereas in a presidential system where non-Muslims sit in cabinet, the leader is the only holder of authority.

He also tried to deal with key public law issues such as the status of non-Muslims and women, and the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states—issues which are crucial to every Muslim political thinker in the contemporary world. In dealing with these issues, Asad realized that the existing system of Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) has serious problems with modern constitutional, penal, and international laws as well as current standards of human rights, especially in relation to the status of women and non-Muslims. He, therefore, endeavoured, within his Islamic legal theory, to resolve these problems. Nevertheless, as it was already analyzed, Asad's theory which relies on the internal mechanisms of adjustment and reform within the framework of the *Shari'ah* including *ijtihad* seems insufficient in resolving the problems. Or rather, he was not fully consistent in applying his hermeneutical method. Although his notion on differentiating between universal and particular ordinances, and on considering the entire context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and his reference to the spirit of Islam could result in liberal and

unrigid interpretations and applications of Islamic law, his emphasis on the actual divine laws (*nusūs*) arouses confusions and contradictions, and seems to limit this liberal tendency.

Within the framework of his legal theory and in line with constitutionalism, he rightly proposed a referendum to legally depose any ruler who governs in deliberate opposition to Islamic law. Nevertheless, his views on the principle of obedience to the ruler are unacceptable and seem to contradict his views on the necessity to get rid of authoritarian regimes. His notion on considering the entire context of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* is also evident in several cases. For example, his belief that Qur'anic punishment could not be applied unless every member of the Islamic society—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—is given his or her right to protection by the community as a whole, shows his unrigid interpretation and application of Islamic law. This tendency also appeared when he interpreted the stipulation declaring that the evidence of two women are equal to that of one man as conditional. Concerning the relationship of the Islamic state with non-Muslim states and his interpretation of *jihād*, he held that Islam forbids wars of aggression and insisted on the purely defensive character of *jihād* war. However, he failed to apply his hermeneutical method and legal theory effectively when dealing with the status of non-Muslim citizens. Indeed, his solution seems to fall short to the requirements of our times and changing social conditions and puts a brake on the process of reformation which he seems to support.

Asad expressly stated that the head of the state must be a Muslim. He also included a series of individual rights providing for freedom of speech so long as such freedom does not aim at undermining the ideals of the state, freedom of religion short of the right to attempt to convert Muslims, free education for all, the right to employment, social security, and the inviolability of property.

In addition, the individual and communal rights which are fundamental attributes of popular sovereignty which in turn constitutes one of the important principles of the *Shari'ah* state are equally compromised by his tendency to remain in line with the traditional view of the *hadith*. Thus, while political parties may exist and oppose one another on policies, they are not to compete for office. Any intention to seek office is to be prohibited.

In short, we could note that Muhammad Asad is frank in his admission that dissension and confusion exist among Muslims as to what constitute the socio-political teachings of Islam on which they

ought to model their Islamic state. Moreover, he sees in his proposal for a codification of *shar'i* ordinances the only way out of this impasse. Whether his plan is feasible or not will depend on the support it will find among like-minded fervent believers in the greatness of original Islam, and on the chances of its realization in an age of doubt, unconcern and unbelief.

One can also declare that Asad aspires, on the one hand, to bring about the rebirth of ideal Islam (which is possible only as a result of a successful struggle against both conservative and secularist Muslims), and, on the other, the acceptance of such an Islam by the world community through the weight of its moral superiority. In this project Asad is caught up in a difficult situation since without the power and influence of the conservative '*ulamā*' being curbed and the current secular tendency being stopped effectively, ideal Islam is difficult to establish within the Muslim community. Similarly, unless some of the clear-worded laws of punishment in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and ideas about *jizyah* are reinterpreted and replaced by legislation based on current standards of human rights and values, his life goal of the renaissance of Islam, is unlikely. On the other hand, the future of Islam also will be relied on the ability of Muslims to place the process of reform of Islamic law as a practical proposition in human affairs within an Islamic framework, and not on secular grounds.

On economic and social matters Asad did not rely on dogmatic support to a great extent. Moreover, his ideas about adequate material benefits for all citizens, supported by Qur'anic quotations, are not much different from those which form the basis of the modern welfare state. He placed a great deal of emphasis on a welfare state actively involved in creating material well-being through education and egalitarian reforms. Similarly, while arguing that property cannot be taken over by the state without due course of law, he declared that it can be taxed heavily in the interest of welfare. He also derived a social insurance scheme from the policies of the *al-Khulafa' al-Rāshidūn*, particularly those of the caliph 'Umar. Asad also told Muslims that it is their duty to complete the work then commenced but neglected in subsequent Islamic eras. As a whole, his economic policy is inspired by both by the historical precedents of the Islamic Commonwealth at the time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, as well as the Western welfare-state system. Asad seems to favour the welfare system and economic equality and distribution.

When Asad was discussing the influence of Western thought on many aspects of contemporary life, he stated that the people of the West

have become disappointed with their religion, and this disappointment, according to him, is reflected in the ethical, social, and political chaos now pervading a large part of the world. But, it seems that Asad does not reject the West completely for he also adopts several Western ideas such as the right to form political parties, the election of a legislative assembly, and the presidential form of government. And, although Asad rejects many Western concepts and institutions, his view of necessity of temporal legislation through *ijtihad* is not very different from Western efforts at promoting economic well-being, social justice and creative leisure for free individuals. Sadly, his call for *ijtihad* also indicates that the prevailing conditions of Muslims at the time— even until now—did not live up to, in most cases, the high moral principles which Asad attributed to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

Asad may be right in his assessment of secular Western societies and the social and moral dilemmas facing them. But, where one cannot agree with him is in his claim that only Islam is all-comprehensive. Other religions, and even the secularized West which derives much of its ethics from them, teach the similar comprehensive social ideal and try to infuse these ideals into the legislation of many lay states. He is, however, right when he views with scepticism the imitateness of secularist Muslims where the West is concerned, and when he is similarly critical of the opposition of conservative circles to everything Western, for they confuse the real values of Islam with the social conventions of Muslim society and take refuge in historical precedents.

Nevertheless, he is not very accurate when he charges the West with opposition to the Islamic state. Yes, there are several orientalist and "Islamic experts" who are still hostile to Islam and Muslims, and yes it is true that not only Islam was misrepresented in the West through past Western scholarship and statemanship, but also it is persistently distorted in the present time especially by Western mass media. Yet, Asad can hardly be unaware that, certainly in the present time, Western understanding and appreciation of the teachings and institutions of Islam have made great strides, not least in co-operation with Muslim scholars. Moreover, his criticism of the conservative '*ulamā*' who insist that the political forms and procedures of a contemporary Islamic state must strictly follow the pattern that evolved in the early period of Islam, seems to allow the Western outsider an excuse for paying more heed to the statements of conservative traditionalist religious leaders than to thinkers like Asad who set their face against historical precedent, deny the validity of any legal injunction outside the *nusūs* and want to re-

activate and apply in a twentieth-century setting the primary sources of *Fiqh*, that is, the Qur'an and *Sunnah* only, in disregard of the decisions of many generations of Muslim jurists.

In the last analysis, however, one can expect that Asad's scheme of the Islamic state allows for human, social and intellectual evolution and thus avoid rigidity in the concept of Islamic political law, and considerable scope for a just and moral society and relatively and potentially a more liberal interpretation of Islam.

Asad's vision of Pakistan, however, still has to be realized in the country's present-day reality. Internal tensions and external pressures constantly beset the country. Pakistan faces political, economic, social, ethnic, and religio-sectarian problems. Economic or class conflicts in which one witnesses conspicuous consumption matched by dire poverty. The ethnic conflicts between the Punjabis and Bengalis resulted in the dismemberment of the state in 1971 with East Pakistan emerging as the sovereign state of Bangladesh. In the present state of Pakistan, the conflicts between the Punjabis and the Sindhis or between the Punjabis and the Pathans, the Sindhis, and the Muhajirs (refugees from India) have continued. Although Pakistan is already an Islamic state—not because its form is ideal but because, or in so far as, its dynamic is idealist—clearly acceptable understanding or compromise has yet to emerge between traditionalists, fundamentalists, and liberals or secularists in giving Pakistan form and content as an Islamic state. Sectarian divisions increase, that strangely enough, threaten the freedom of religion of the Muslims in this Islamic state. The triangular struggle for power between the president, the prime minister, and the military has remained unabated. Pakistan also has been plagued by increasing political corruption and every kind of corruption, which their speed can truly be described as exponential.

In aggravating the problems, Pakistan also faces certain geopolitical pressures because of its strategic location. On its long eastern frontier, indeed, Pakistanis feel that their long eastern frontier is threatened by India, their inveterate enemy which they believe has forcefully grabbed the valley of Kashmir which is predominantly Muslim. Pakistan's enmity with India ever since its formation in 1947 has remained the single preponderant preoccupation in foreign policy. These bitter political realities not only make Pakistan a special case of study but have created in the minds of its citizens increasing disillusionment with the Islamic character of the state and perhaps cynicism with the very name of the state, Pakistan, which means "the

land of the pure.” Since 1988 Pakistanis have been successful in returning back and maintaining democracy, after long years of military dictatorship. But, Pakistanis are still far away to achieve the goal of Pakistan, that is, to enable Muslims “to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teaching and requirements of Islam.”

(The Political Thought of Muhammad Asad. By Pipip Ahmad Rifai Hasan. M. A. Thesis in the Department of Religion, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, February 1998.)

اس امر کی تصریح کر دینا بھی نہیں ضروری تھا تو ان کے رسالہ ترجمان القرآن میں ۱۹۳۷ء کے شمارے سے لکھا ہے
 اہل اپنی ذاتی ذمہ داری برائے حال، مگر "اس لیے اس کے متعلق کسی ممکن سے نہ ہوگا"۔ اس کے پاس میں مدخل: "جائزہ" و
 حق ہوگا۔ نیز اس کے علاوہ اپنی جو کتابیں میں لکھی ہیں ان میں سے کئی کئی ممکن سے کوئی ممکن نہ رہیں۔

ابو اعلیٰ

۱۹۳۸ء (۱۶ اپریل ۱۹۳۸ء)

یہ بیان ۱۶ اپریل ۱۹۳۸ء کو وقف کمیٹی کے اجلاس میں لکھی گئی تھی اور اس میں درج ہے

(۱) صاحب شہداء کے لیے وقف

(۲) مولانا محمد علی صاحب

(۳) صاحبہ کے لیے وقف

(۴) مولانا محمد علی صاحب

(۵) مولانا محمد علی صاحب

کمیٹی کے ہر ایک ذمہ دار کو یہ پیش کرنا ہے کہ وہ جو رقمیں لکھی گئی ہیں ان کے لیے وہ کیا کام کر سکتے ہیں

و نیز وہ پیش کرتے ہیں کہ ان کے لیے کیا کام کر سکتے ہیں۔ چنانچہ میں نے وہ رقمیں پیش کرتے ہوئے اس بیان کے

ساتھ منسلک ہے۔

ابو اعلیٰ

Mawlana Mawdudi's signed statement (16 April 1938) Asad's name is mentioned as a member of Waqf Committee of Dar-ul-Islam (No. 3)

III

REVIEWS

SAḤIḤ AL-BUKHĀRI

(vol. 1, pt. 1, Srinagar: The Arafat Publications, 1935)

While already more than a dozen English versions of the Holy Qur'an exist and better interpretations are promised every now and then, no serious attempt has been undertaken to make the vast literature of Hadith accessible to the English-reading public; although, as Mr. Leopold Weiss, now better known by his Muslim name Mohammad Asad—points out in his short preface to the book under review: "It is in the Hadith, the authentic reports of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Mohammad, that the spirit of Islam finds its most concrete expression. They show with unmistakable clearness the last Prophet's attitude towards various aspects of religious and social life, and are thus the only means of avoiding misunderstanding and wilful misrepresentation of the Quranic teachings."

Of these authentic Traditions the foremost collection is that of Mohammad-ibn-Isma'il al-Bukhāri, which apart from its canonical sanctity among the Mussalmans, is an unique monument of scrupulous and critical compilation that historiography has known. A French translation of this great work appeared some forty years ago but is out of print now. Scholarly critics do not find it satisfactory and some of the footnotes, the translators chose to add, are, to say the least, silly. Mr. Asad's enterprise is therefore sure to be received with acclamation not only by the Orientalist but also by a growing English-reading public among the Muslim community in whose interest the able translator has primarily set himself to perform the task. The translation is throughout illuminated by explanatory notes which occupy more than half the volume. In these footnotes, besides elucidating meanings and solving difficulties of the text Mr. Asad has kept in view the doubts of the modern sceptic, succeeding, we hope, in dispelling them to a large extent.

According to Mr. Asad's plan the whole book will be published in 40 parts followed by an index to complete it. The neat printing of the Arabic text side by side with the English versions is likely to excite the jealousy of many a pressman who has to tackle with the perplexities of such bilingual publications. On the whole, we can sincerely congratulate Mr. Asad for such a hopeful beginning and trust his learning and labour will receive the recognition they so eminently deserve.

(in: *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad, Deccan), October 1936, pp. 671-672).

MARYAM JAMEELAH

SAḤIḤ AL-BUKHĀRI: THE EARLY YEARS OF ISLAM

(Trans. Muhammad Asad. Dar al-Andalus: Gibraltar, reprinted 1981. pp. 306.)

Between 1935—1938, five instalments of an English translation of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the most authoritative collection of *Hadith*, were published by Muhammad Asad, (Leopold Weiss), the eminent Austrian convert, in Lahore, originally at the suggestion of Allama Iqbal. The work was intended to be completed over the next five or six years. But then World War II broke out and the author was interned from 1939—1945 in British custody. Publication was about to be resumed when the holocaust which followed upon the Partition of the Indo-Pak subcontinent resulted in the destruction of the author's library of Arabic books, including the manuscripts of nearly three-quarters of *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Thus perished beyond recall more than ten years of intensive labour and research. The book under review is the only fragment which survived.

Unlike most translations of *Hadith*, the complete *isnad* or chain of transmitters is retained and the English published side by side with the original Arabic text. The printing, binding and paper are beautiful. The author's illuminating commentary shows that he is a competent scholar of *Hadith* and the Arabic language.

Unfortunately, however, his explanatory notes sometimes betray his over-zealousness to explain away everything rationally. For example, he interprets the Holy Prophet's *Mi'raj* or Ascension to heaven as a purely spiritual and visionary experience while, according to the overwhelming majority of the Companions, he was transported to Jerusalem in body as well as in spirit. He tries to explain away the miracle of the Angel Gabriel's cutting open the Holy Prophet's chest and washing and purifying his heart, saying that this should not be understood literally. Whereas one *Hadith* clearly says that angels do not

enter a house where there are pictures, he thinks that this applies only to the places of worship. Most surprisingly he holds that instructions for *Hijab* or veiling and staying at home were meant only for the wives of the Holy Prophet.

Asad insists that the door of *Ijtihad* was never closed and all Muslims must exercise their right to independent thinking as an essential prerequisite for an Islamic renaissance. But if such are the results of independent *Ijtihad*, one may become a little inclined to keep the door closed.

However, the author fully accepts the authenticity of Hadith and forcefully contends that *Bukhari* has proven their accuracy with much more care than is accorded to ordinary historical documents. The contents are divided into four parts: 'How Revelation Began', 'The Merits of the Prophet's Companions', 'The Beginnings of Islam', and 'The Book of Campaigns'. The opening chapter is most impressive, so much so that it is almost as if the Holy Prophet were speaking directly to us! The narrative is so vivid and the distant past is so well animated on these pages, that it seems as if the Holy Prophet and his Companions were living and breathing today.

Other English translations of Hadith have appeared since 1938 but this remains far superior in quality to them all. This may also be ranked as the best of all Asad's books.

(in: *Muslim World Book Review*, 3/3 (1983), pp. 3-4.)

MARYAM JAMEELAH

ISLAM AT THE CROSSROADS

By Muhammad Asad. Dar al-Andalus: Gibraltar, 14th revised edition, 1982. pp. 104.

Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) (1900-) is no doubt the best-known and most influential living European convert to Islam. Of Jewish origin, born and raised in Austria, he became a journalist and first visited the Middle East in 1922 as correspondent for an important German paper. Attracted to the traditional Arab life and finding there much that was more human than the impersonal, mechanised society in post-war Europe, he rejected the West and in 1926 embraced Islam. He has spent the remainder of his long life in Muslim countries, studying and writing.

Western domination during and since European colonial rule, is the greatest threat to Islam's survival ever confronted by the Muslim leadership. After nominal political independence, the pace of westernisation has vastly accelerated as more and more Muslims, far from returning to their roots, seek assimilation into the mainstream of modern life. As the crisis of cultural and spiritual identity has grown increasingly acute, the subject of this book is even more vital and relevant today than when first written for the English-speaking intelligentsia of the Indo-Pak subcontinent over half a century ago.

The author bases his theme on the premise that because the spirit of modern Western civilisation and that of Islam are totally irreconcilable, the adoption of the former is tantamount to the eventual extinction of the latter. For several centuries the temporal civilisation of Islam has been subjected to repeated aggression at the hands of the Western powers and has seen a steady retreat of its religion and culture. As victims of Western aggression, the Muslims are not unique. The rest of the East and all non-white peoples without exception have succumbed to the same fate. The impact of colonialism and imperialism and the subsequent reaction of the victims against their indigenous roots, tell the same sad story all over the world. However, it cannot be

denied that for historical and geographical reasons, the Muslim lands have suffered most from the attack.

After a vehement denunciation of Christianity, the author stresses the materialistic nature of the West since the Renaissance, totally contrary to any culture founded on religion. The real origin of the modern West, he claims, is not Christianity but ancient Rome which was also based on a purely utilitarian concept of life. He traces the hostility of the modern West towards Islam back to the time of the Crusades. He denies any valid excuse for Europe's conflict with Islam and says there is no reason why their relations should not have been friendly! However, with Christendom and Islam both sharing the same prophetic heritage with the latter superseding and occupying much of the territory of the former - geographically contiguous, both vigorous missionary faiths with universal claims - violent conflict between the two was inevitable.

The reviewer agrees with the author that to expect a revival of Islam in the West soon or that mass conversions are about to take place in Europe or America, is mere wishful thinking. The fact that Western converts to Islam have greatly increased in number and are no longer so rare or unusual as they were five decades ago, when Asad first wrote this book, is still no argument that Islam has begun to exert any significant influence today on Western society as a whole.

Asad devotes a long chapter to the evils of Western education and its undeniable detrimental effects upon the Muslim youth. Tragically, however, he fails to provide any viable alternative. To the reviewer's knowledge, no contemporary Muslim scholar (Asad included) has successfully upheld in detail the methods and content of the traditional system of Islamic education which was deliberately destroyed by colonial and post-colonial rule. Asad, like all the others, simply dismisses the *madrasah* as 'obsolete', its merits undeserving of serious consideration today.

Asad correctly regards the uncritical imitation of Western outward forms by growing multitudes of modern Muslims as the greatest threat to the temporal survival of Islam. No right-thinking Muslim can doubt the truth of the saying of the Holy Prophet that whoever imitates the unbelievers becomes one of them. However, Asad makes an astonishing contradiction, curiously refuting all his previous arguments, in his note on pages 78-9 where he says that because the adoption of Western architecture and dress in Muslim countries is an accomplished fact, what was wrong when he first wrote this book fifty years ago, cannot now be criticised, condemned or opposed - simply

because it has prevailed. But surely the past is 'dead' and 'unreturnable' only if we regard it as such.

In the concluding chapter, Asad prescribes adherence to the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet as the only remedy for our ills. He also presents very sound arguments for the authenticity of the *Hadith*. But in his recently added notes on pages 83 and 96, he again contradicts his assertions in the main text where he complains that the 'medieval' scholars enlarged the sphere of the *Sunnah* too much, failing to distinguish between the eternal ethical principles and those *Hadith* arising from restricted, time-bound situations. He thinks we are not obliged to follow the latter. This distinction between the 'permanent' and the 'changing' is a concept peculiar to modernists and utterly inconceivable to any of those who compiled the great collections of *Hadith*. Also, his plea for the creation of a brand-new *Fiqh* freed from 'medievalism' betrays the same trend of mind.

Unfortunately this book, which so passionately argues against the adoption of a foreign culture hostile in every respect to Islam, is not itself free from Western 'modernism'. This tendency is particularly marked in the new Introduction and recently added notes. Asad's concept of history is tainted by evolutionism and by overtly rationalistic exposition of religious ideas. Typically of adherents of the reformist movements, he is anti-*Tasawwuf* and opposes both the Sufis and the '*ulamā*'. Thus social stability and equilibrium based on transcendental ideals have been mistaken for 'stagnation' and 'sterility'. Yet it was this same 'decadent', 'medieval' society which could exert such a powerful attraction for a young German journalist that just because of what he saw and personally experienced in the Arab East sixty years ago, he embraced Islam and never wanted to live in Europe again. It is extremely doubtful if he could feel the same were he a Western youth visiting Arabia for the first time today. Certainly, judging from the ideas he expresses in his books, he would be repelled by what he saw and feel no urge at all to change his faith. For this reason, the reviewer cannot understand why the author hesitates to accept the historical and cultural legacy of Islam as a whole, the former being the concrete, tangible expression of the latter. 'Creativity' does not grow in a void.

The importance of this little book cannot be over-stated. First published in Delhi and Lahore the very same year the reviewer was born - as *The Road to Mecca* inspired her to embrace Islam, so *Islam at the Crossroads* not only left a decisive impact on her thought but also determined the direction of her entire literary career. Without this work,

none of the reviewer's own books could have been written. A classic on the subject, it has exerted much influence on thinking Muslims throughout the world.

(in: *Muslim World Book Review*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1985), pp. 39-41.)

MURAD WILFRIED HOFMANN

**LEOPOLD WEISS ALIAS
MUHAMMAD ASAD -
VON GALIZIEN NACH ARABIEN
1900-1927**

By Günter Windhager, with an introduction by Andre Gingrich.
Böhlau Verlag, Vienna, Austria, 2002. pp. 230.

It is now 10 years that Muhammad Asad, the 20th century's most influential European Muslim, left us. But aside from his own biographical writings—the bestseller *The Road to Mecca* (1954) and his 1988 interview with his old employer, the *Frankfurter (Allgemeine) Zeitung*—until recently there was no comprehensive biography of this illustrious man. This lacuna has now been solidly filled, if only partially, i. e. up to his official conversion to Islam in 1926 in Berlin and 1927 in Cairo. This covers his quests as a student, film libretist and journalist “from Galicia [his native Lemburg and Czernoviz] to Arabia”, ending with his preparations for *hāj*.

The author, an unassuming but enthusiastic research assistant for ethnology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, working both like a detective and a good prosecutor (never taking a confession at face value), has written what promises to become the *definite* biography of the early Leopold Weiss. His pioneering book is not only precious for its set of rare (and mostly unpublished) photographs. (Of these a 1932 portrait makes the front cover hauntingly compelling by showing a Gandhi-like Asad, head shaven and with penetrating, yet sensitive black eyes.) It is also precious for its apparatus that includes a three-page chronology; a complete list of his publications, tracking 45 German newspaper articles; and a three-page list of publications on Asad. Yet Windhager managed to present a text that reads like a novel in spite of being uncompromisingly scientific.

It is no surprise that the author was able to discover that some of *The Road to Mecca* is elegantly fictitious and, according to Pola Hamida Asad, essentially a "spiritual autobiography". (Did not Johann Wolfgang von Goethe already entitle his one *Fact and Fiction*?) Thus it is now established that his first wife, Elsa Schiemann, née Specht - not 15 but 22 years older than him - and her little son accompanied Asad not only during his second "Oriental Journey" (1924/26) but already during the first one (1922/23), and that "Zayd", their Arab companion was a literary invention.

Other, more important facts dug out by Windhager are:

- details about his mother's Feigenbaum family;
- the fate of his father, step mother, and siblings (Heinrich Weiss and Rachel Weiss) during the Nazi period, and Asad's attempts to save them all from concentration camp;
- the fact that Asad at Vienna University not only studied the history of art and philosophy but also chemistry and physics - with a star like Erwin Schrödinger, Nobel prize winner in 1933.
- amusing details of Asad's attempts to establish himself among the intellectual *bohemia* in Vienna and later in the exciting Berlin of the early twenties.

Important, too, are the author's contributions to the understanding of the making of Asad, i. e. short portraits of the decisive intellectual and political trends before and shortly after World War I, including Freudianism, anti-Semitism, Zionism, exoticism, and anti-rationalism. This contextualization helps to situate Asad's biting criticism of the cultural and moral decline of the Occident - just think of Nietzsche and Spengler! It does not, however, uncover the role that the growing anti-Semitism in Vienna might have played in Asad's later option for the Orient. The author recalls that Theodor Herzl and Asad were similar in being Austrian, assimilated Jews, and journalists. However, while Herzl indulged in Marxism and Zionism, a secular version of the arrogant doctrine of "God's Chosen People", Asad rejected Zionism as a racist aberration. He knew after all first hand that Palestine was not a "land without people". Thus he recovered his own Abrahamic roots in the equalitarianism and universalism of Islam.

Windhager confirms my impression that Asad's early infatuation with the Orient had nothing to do yet with Islam but rather with his boundless admiration for all things Arabic. This view is corroborated by

Unromantisches Morgenland (Unromantic Orient), Asad's first (but still untranslated) book of 1924. Indeed, as late as 1927, Asad still seemed to admire Islam for being the *Arabs'* religion. Poldi, as his family and friends nicknamed him, led a life so full of events, ruptures, and even contradictions that one may wonder with Gingrich whether this book "really refers to one single human life only" (p. 11).

Should Günther Windhager - as I very much hope - embark on a second volume, covering no longer, like here, Asad's life *towards* Islam but *in* Islam (1927 - 1992), this impression of a life — rich, puzzling, and full of ruptures—would re-emerge. But this second period of his life was not only extremely adventurous — in Saudi Arabia, Libya, India, Pakistan, the United States, Morocco and Spain. It was also the phase of Asad's development into a leading, visionary scholar of Islam. In order to appreciate the significance of Asad's contribution to almost all of the sciences of Islam, the author would of course have to enter rather deeply into the religion of Islam, not only from a socio-cultural viewpoint - and thus risk becoming himself a Muslim like the fascinating object of his study.

I also hope that this book will soon be translated into English, as a minimum, in order to allow access of the many admirers of Asad, particularly in India, Pakistan, Britain and the United States, to the only period during which Asad published in German almost exclusively.

In closing I should acknowledge that this is a meticulously proof-read book, a rarity in the German book market. Another reason for congratulating both the author and his publisher is for their extraordinary contribution to the intellectual history of post-enlightenment Europe.

(in: *The Muslim World Book Review*, 23/2 (2003), pp. 33-35).*

See for another review by Peter Heine in: *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* (Leipzig), 98 (2003), cols. 560-4\562—Chaghatai.

Villa Asadiyya
La Montagne
TANGIER, Morocco

March 19, 1976

My dear Aslam,

أخي، السلام، (19/3/76)

It was with infinite sadness that I received your news of the death of your father and my beloved friend. Although this news was expected for some time, it did not make it less painful. May God grant him all that he so richly deserved through his efforts and his exemplary life, and may He console you and your family for your own irreparable loss. As a matter of fact, I did not write to you for a long time because I was precisely afraid to receive such news as this.

إنا لله، وإنا إليه راجعون

The enclosed few lines do not really express - and cannot express - what I felt for him in the course of the forty years of our friendship. I have no doubt, however, that his efforts will be long remembered and appreciated by all Muslims who came into contact with him or heard of him.

Hamida joins me, of course, in my feelings. Although she did not know him as well as I did, she was always deeply impressed by his shining goodness and sincerity. The world is really a poorer place without him.

May God bless you all. Please keep in contact with us.

Yours as always,

Asad

Muhammad Asad's letter of condolence on Ch. Niāz 'Ali's death (1976)

ELMA RUTH HARDER

MUHAMMAD ASAD'S *THE UNROMANTIC ORIENT*

A copy of this small German book arrived on my desk one day in 1999. As I started to read it, the travelogue became my own journey also. This, however, was no journey of just travelling from place to place but was characterized by the tremor of resonating heartstrings. Muhammad Asad's exquisite narration of what he observed and what he experienced goes beyond the words he writes, and just as I now find myself flipping into the present tense in this sentence, I found myself entering his past, as we trudge together through the old streets in Jerusalem and Damascus and Istanbul, and there, suddenly, I live in the present, in 1923. In the endless day, we watch people walking in the streets. We see their daily encounters and interactions and become a part of place—their day is my day, and the air they breathe is what I breathe. We're here with a complete presence of heart and mind in the Old Quarter, or whatever place we happen to be, in 1923, and at the same time, have full consciousness of the historical context, the European *Weltanschauung*, the tides of Jewish allegiance and guilt, the political stage of the world, and Asad's yearnings for aesthetic fulfillment. All of this is in conversation in the heart.

This sense of presence kept me grasping for the right word, the right expression, as I sought to render his manifold ideas and complex sentences from German into English. Muhammad Asad had a gifted pen and I apologize to all readers of this translation for inadequacies where my rendition falls short, especially those passages wherein the author's thought is not completely or accurately conveyed. His was an art, and in those exquisite descriptions in German where the sentence goes on and around, with several convolutions and subnotations, you know that you can feel the situation—rather, you can feel that you know what he means—and it is there in those sentences that I would dwell and revisit, to see how things could better be expressed.

Several years after first encountering this fascinating journey, as I write these final lines, I am conscious of so many others who have helped in the preparation of this translation which now makes this remarkable travel account accessible to English readers. Numerous individuals helped with the German, to decipher exactly what it was that Leopold Weiss, who would soon become Muhammad Asad, meant to say, especially: Karolin Kettler, who first appeared in my life in Madinah, exactly when I needed her, just before the beginning of Ḥajj, March 2000 and Christopher Tingley, who enhanced the excerpt which appeared in *Islamic Studies*, March 2001. My daughter Noor and son Bāsīṭ helped in so many exceptional ways. And without my husband Muzaffar's diligent support, this publication would have never seen the light of day. I must, therefore, acknowledge their direct and indirect participation in this project which has been purely a labour of love sustained over several years

Unromantisches Morgenland, aus dem Tagebuch einer Reise was Muhammad Asad's first book. At that time, he was known as Leopold Weiss. It was written under contract with *Frankfurter Zeitung*. It first appeared in instalments in German newspapers, and was subsequently published by Frankfurter Societäts-Drückerei in 1924. The original book was 159 pages. It consisted of excerpts from his travel journal from March 14 till October 10, 1923, and included 59 black and white photographs which he himself had taken. Beginning his journey in the Jerusalem train station, Leopold Weiss travelled to Cairo, returned to Palestine, thereafter went to Amman and parts of Transjordan; in July and August he walked from Haifa to Damascus, then on to Beirut, to Alexandria, made another visit to Cairo and in September voyaged through the Dardenelles to Constantinople. The travelogue ended in Malta, on the brink of his return to Europe.

A restless, yearning spirit on a journey to unknown places with an incredibly keen sense of observation and an openness to unfamiliar vistas—such descriptors of this young traveller lead to further questions: Where is he actually going? And why? Does he know when he has arrived? Does he know what it is that he will recognize as he seeks some kind of fulfilling culmination? As the familiar past merges into the shrouded future, how does he accommodate both horizons? He cherishes “the endless moment”, “the endless day”, from which he need not be driven and wherein he can rest and ponder. In his introduction to the travelogue, Asad muses, “We want to come out of the securities of our uniformity, wherein few things are unfamiliar and nothing is

surprising, into the immense strangeness of this 'other' world, which is not ours. Unbridgeable, strange, insultingly foreign..." The metaphor of a bridge and the reined anticipation of what remains to be discovered recur often, with numerous levels of meaning and their implication. On October 6, 1923, just prior to his departure from his Orient, he provided a thread to twine the metaphor that would resonate throughout his life's journey.

"I walked over the Galata Bridge at seven o'clock, to experience Istanbul one more time, and half of the great bridge was lost in the fog. Nothing was visible of Istanbul. Dark flecks in a milky mist pushed together several coal barges in the Golden Horn. I walked rather briskly, and the domes and spires of Istanbul started to be more visible with each step. They grew up in contour and dimension, becoming continually bigger and clearer. And when I had gone over half of the bridge and turned around, Galata had disappeared into the fog as well as the beginning of the bridge and the other shore of the Golden Horn."

Three decades later, Muhammad Asad published the story of his "home-coming of the heart", his Arabian years, in *The Road to Mecca*, and that book ends with this memorable image:

"I turn around in my saddle and see behind me the waving, weaving mass of thousands of white-clad riders and, beyond them, the bridge over which I have come: its end is just behind me while its beginning is already lost in the mists of distance."

At all levels throughout his life, Muhammad Asad sought a sense of fulfillment of his journey, a culmination of sorts, and in *The Unromantic Orient* he shared the beginning of discovering a new East merging with his old West.

This process of discovery demanded forsaking old ideas, accepting unforeseen challenges, learning new things. *The Unromantic Orient* reveals how he struggled with his biases and predilections about European attitudes, Jewish zeal and alienation, colonization, Arab demeanor, political ideology, and harsh daily realities.

At times he dabbles with obvious stereotypes at the expense of over-simplification, describing "half-developed urbanites, the Effendis",

how "only the Bedouins can be spoken of as the pure children of the Arabs", and the "Palestine machoism" of Jewish colonists. He generalizes that "Muslims view their women in the same way they regard children, trying to protect what is important in order not to lose it, but it seems that that which is cherished is thereby devalued and gradually becomes a comfortable obsession" and goes on to confuse local cultural patterns and religion, saying that this attitude towards women is "the most distressing part of Islam." He takes especial note of the women he does see, and it seems that he yearns to have contact with women: the lone woman with the great black sad self-confident eyes in the market in Damascus, the elegant Yemeni Jewess who is the prototype of all Jews of the southern lands, the silhouetted legendary woman at the well, and the Bedouin with blue tattoos on chin and lower lip, "sitting sideways on a little grey donkey like Mary in the flight to Egypt".

It is clear that these experiences are his initial exposure to this new world; he is just beginning to learn about Islam and the Orient. This young correspondent, though considered an expert in Middle Eastern affairs, is not mature in thought or sensitivity, nor does he understand the whole picture yet. For example, he mistakenly says that the Dome of the Rock is "Umar's Mosque", and goes further in his mistake to declare that "it is the most sacred mosque after the Makkan Ka'bah". His knowledge of Islam is precursory and perhaps he has just been introduced to *hadith* literature, but it is obvious that he is attracted to this fount of wisdom. During Ramadan in Jerusalem, he vaguely refers to a saying of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him: "The physical worship leads to the metaphysical"; later, after visiting a dervish cloister in Istanbul, he writes: "I think of the words of the prophets, 'The discipline of the body, of the limbs, leads to the discipline of the soul.'" This idea, which he attributes first to "the prophet" and five months later to "the prophets" was kept simmering at the conscious level throughout his travels. What role did this nascent interest have in his later years when he devoted almost a decade of his life to the translation of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, one of the most respected collections of *hadith*? Did he know in 1923 that he was at the verge of entering Islam?

When he undertook his first journey to the Orient, Asad was a young man of twenty-three whose worldview had been shaped by the catastrophic events of the First World War and its impact on Europe. His was a generation filled with despair and dissatisfaction. At the time of his travels, powerful intellectual currents, unleashed after the Great War, were just beginning to reshape European thought and the greatest

of all forces in this remaking was a sense of disillusionment with all philosophies that had formed Europe's intellectual landscape.

The Vienna that he knew so well was the intellectual and cultural center of Europe where the views of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Ludwig Wittgenstein filled the air. He must have known of scholars such as Karl Kraus whose public lectures in Vienna attracted hundreds of enthusiasts and who attacked everything and everyone. He had been enrolled at the University of Vienna to study the history of art and philosophy and had frequented the literary cafés. It is highly probable that the cynical, sarcastic polemics of Anton Kuh contributed to his disquietude. Perhaps, it was not merely accidental that Asad's intellectual journey began at this time and that he found the Europe of his youth so appalling; a whole generation of Europeans was then looking eastward for spiritual, intellectual, and emotional nourishment. Asad's short-lived infatuation with Buddhism and Taoism, his critical analyses of the consuming corruption and moral bankruptcy of European society, and his romanticized "orient"—all stem from this great spiritual and social upheaval that was transforming Europe at the time our young traveller sets forth on his first journey into an unknown and mysterious land where he would discover a new home, a new fraternity, so intense that he would passionately call out: "O, my Arab people!"

Was this man on the verge of becoming a Muslim? This question followed me throughout his travels, and as I worked through his journal entries, I would be alert for indications of his spiritual leaning. In these pages, he sees himself directly where he is, in the immediate "today", enwrapped in the Arab ambiance, as he simultaneously takes a sidelong glance at his own Jewish heritage and European lineage. He looks at European lifestyle and continually analyzes the European ways. A cursory glance at the index of this book immediately reveals the many concepts with which he takes issue. On June 14, he makes a reference to Lao-tse, a scant hint to the Taoism he had been following in Europe. He makes critical assessments of the direction the Jewish tradition has taken, and airs his misgivings of Zionism. In a way, he tries to put the Europeans, the Western powers, and the Western lifestyle in one camp, and the Arab world, the Muslims and their ways of being in the other. It seems he is fascinated by all things Arab, and this opens a receptive window within him to the world of Islam. He doesn't see it as a religion, but as a way of being that permeates all levels of existence, and is existence itself. And just as he

perceives and describes their "straight line of existence", it seems inevitable that he finds himself in that position as well.

Years later, Muhammad Asad mentioned this book in Chapter VII of *The Road to Mecca*, where he says that he had chosen to call it the "unromantic orient" because it was "not a book about the romantic, exotic outward picture of the Muslim East but rather an endeavour to penetrate to its day-by-day realities." He went on to say that "although its anti-Zionist attitude and unusual predilection for the Arabs caused something of a flutter in the German press, I am afraid it did not sell very well". Yet the question "Will Zionism die soon?" is as valid today as it was then. Hearing it spoken by a young European Jew in 1924 adds a new dimension to our understanding of the conflict in Palestine today.

All in all, this is a fascinating account of the Middle East in the early 1920's. Intrigued by the timeless spiritual and cultural riches he found, deeply affected by his experiences in the Middle East and gripped by a spiritual quest, Muhammad Asad engages in questions of meaning to understand the Orient, and thereby prompts us to consider new ways of thinking, and heightens our sensibilities and feelings for other people, places, and their ways of being.

(*The Unromantic Orient*. Translated from the German by Elma Ruth Harder. Sherwood Park, Canada: Al-Qalam Publishing, 2004, Introduction).

MARYAM JAMEELAH

THE UNROMANTIC ORIENT (Tr. Elma R. Harder, 2005)

This book written in the form of a diary, describes the efforts of a young Jewish journalist, Leopold Weiss, to gain profound knowledge of the lands and peoples of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Turkey. He never travelled like a European tourist but trekked much of the way on foot and adopted the lifestyle of the common people. This youth was already appalled by the crass materialism and mechanized life of Europe and, living among these simple Arabs of the Biblical lands, he found contentment and peace. His first experience, which converted him to a deep love of the Arab East, was on the train to Palestine when a total stranger—a pretty Arab shopkeeper—shared with him half a cake he had purchased especially for Weiss.

Weiss found the same generous hospitality everywhere. He was also sympathetic towards the indigenous Christians and Jews and more and more hostile to the rootless Zionist immigrants and English colonial overlords. He was soon consumed by a love for all things Arab, completely unaware this journey would open the door for his conversion and deep commitment to Islam. Weiss gave his full support to the native urban rebellion against British rule and Zionist immigration but he did not at the time foresee the fatal flaws of the nationalist leaders. Everywhere Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was being hailed in 1923 as a great hero by ordinary Arabs and Turks. It was too early to predict what the direction or indeed the consequences of Atatürk's later religious reforms would be. Like so many others, the author was misled to believe that the nationalist movement would result in a great Arab and Turkish cultural renaissance. Such was his close identification with them that more than once he cried out ecstatically 'Oh my Arab people!'

It was barely three years later in 1926 after his return to Europe when Weiss formally pronounced his *shahādah*, and took up the name of Muhammad Asad. The dignified nobility of impoverished peasants and Bedouin, and witnessing humble porters spending their lives panting

under unbearable burdens while still remaining cheerful and humane, left an indelible impression upon him. Consequently, he embraced Islam in his mid-twenties and spent much of his long life in Arab and other Muslim lands studying the writing about Islam. His mastery over classical Qur'anic Arabic, *Shari'ah* and *fiqh* qualified him as a *'ālim*. His commitment and loyalty to Islam and the Muslim world was apparent, but in later years it did not go unquestioned. It was indeed his works *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934) which inspired this reviewer's literary career and his autobiographical *The Road to Mecca* (1953) which persuaded the reviewer to spend her life in the Muslim world.

The Unromantic Orient (1923) was the prelude to all these significant events.

(in: *The Muslim World Book Review*, 26/i (2005), pp. 74-75.





Leopold Weiss was born in a Jewish family on 2 July, 1900, in Lemberg, Poland, then part of the Austrian Empire. Muhammad Asad died on 20 February 1992 and is buried in the small Muslim cemetery at Granada in Spain. After embracing Islam in 1926, he devoted his life for the resurgence and renaissance of the Muslim Ummah.

Muhammad Asad is truly a visionary scholar of Islamic studies who envisioned revival of Muslim thought based on the Holy Quran, Sunnah and Ijtehad.

Among his contributions include, **The Message of Quran**, an interpretation and commentary on the Muslim Holy Book, **Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam**, an annotated translation of the first volume of the Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari, and **The Road to Mecca**, a travelogue.

Muhammad Asad: Europe is a scholarly and research-oriented study of Asad's life and works from 1926 when he embraced Islam to onwards. This study spans over 1200 pages in 2 volumes, also having some rare photographs right from Asad's birth certificate to his graveyard in Spain.

The Truth Society, Pakistan has undertaken this project of bringing out this voluminous work on Asad which is edited by M. Ikram Chaghatai, a reputed research scholar. No doubt, Asad is a source of guidance and inspiration to the spiritless and desperate Muslims of today who are exposed to the cultural and intellectual invasion from the occident and also to bring out a true picture of Islam in the West, a religion of peace and harmony.

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