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CHAPTER 2

THE URGENT NEED FOR UNBIASED INFORMATION ABOUT ISLAM

Many periodicals and books today systematically present a highly biased and misleading picture of Islam. Amongst other things, it is often alleged that Islam is intolerant towards people of other faiths. The truth is that, amongst the religions of the world, Islam is unique as regards the high degree of tolerance which, throughout history, it has shown towards non-Muslim religions, in particular Christianity and Judaism. This is because tolerance of the "People of the Book" stems directly from the Koran and is encapsulated in Islamic law. Many will no doubt react to this statement with incredulity, but this will be enlarged upon, with many Koranic quotations, in the course of this chapter.

Islamic tolerance first showed itself with regard to Christianity. The Arab armies conquered many territories, and the first religion which they encountered was Christianity. In 635 A.D. the Muslims conquered Syria and Palestine. In 637 A.D., after a long siege, they entered the city of Jerusalem peacefully. The Patriarch,

Saint Sophronius, declared that he would sign no peace treaty with anyone other than the Caliph Omar himself. As a result, Omar traveled to Jerusalem with one servant and one mule—the servant and the Caliph took turns at walking and riding. When they reached the city, it was the servant's turn to ride, and the Caliph entered Jerusalem on foot. The Patriarch and the Caliph signed the "Covenant of Omar", the provisions of which are accepted by the native Christians and Muslims of Jerusalem to this day. When the Patriarch Sophronius invited Omar to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, he refused, on the grounds that, if he did so, his followers would wish to turn the church into a mosque.

For theological and historical reasons which I will not go into here, Jerusalem is in fact the third of the three quintessential Islamic cities: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Since this early conquest, Jerusalem has been under unbroken Muslim jurisdiction, with the exception of the 88-year period of crusader rule. The second Temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Romans, but the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, despite a checkered history, continues to flourish as a church to this day, and has been under the guardianship of generations of Muslim caretakers.

When the Arab armies reached India, there was indeed temple destruction and massacre. All that can be said here is that the Muslims in due course came to realize that the Hindus were not simply idolaters (like the pre-Islamic inhabitants of Arabia), but that they too, in their fashion, could by analogy be regarded as "People of the Book"; as a result, they were treated with tolerance in areas where Muslims ruled. Centuries later, under the great Mughals, there was an incredibly fruitful period of cultural and artistic interchange with the Hindu tradition, especially under Akbar (1542-1605) and Shah Jahan (1592-1666).

The latter's son, Dara Shikoh, declared: "The science of Vedanta and the science of Sufism are one." Dara Shikoh also had the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Yoga Vasīshtha*, and several of the *Upanishads* translated into Persian. Alas, the last of the great Mughals, the zealot Aurungzebe, reversed the tolerance of centuries. Nevertheless, the English historian Robert Lethbridge, in his book *A History of India*, says: "Amongst the courteous and order-loving natives of India religious disturbances are extremely rare. . . . The earnest and fearless way in which most Mussulmans rigorously attend to their devotional duties at the stated times is generally noticed [by Hindus] in their favor."[1]

The Arab armies never reached Indonesia, and yet this is the most populous Muslim country in the world. It was the Arab traders—and especially the Sufis amongst them—who converted Indonesia and the Malay peninsula to Islam.

One thinks also of the Mongols, who swept away all that was in their path, but who ended up by adopting the religion of the people they conquered.

In Yugoslavia, it was mainly the heretical Bogomil community which, during the period of Turkish rule, converted to Islam; today the Islamic community is to be found chiefly in Bosnia, where it constitutes the majority. The Serbs remained Orthodox and the Croats remained Catholic.

The falseness of the allegation that Islam was spread by the sword is decisively shown by the fact that the populations of Greece and Spain (both under Muslim rule for several centuries) remained Christian. The monastic community of Mount Athos in the North-East of Greece

[1] Robert Lethbridge, *A History of India* (London: Macmillan, 1881), pp. 127, 132.

flourished during the period that Greece was under Turkish rule but, as soon as the Turks were expelled from Greece, the monks of Mount Athos began to get grief from the modernistic and secularistic Greek government.

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It is constantly repeated that Islam was imposed by the sword. It was no doubt thus in the case of the idolatrous and treacherous tribes of ancient Arabia and elsewhere, but not in the case of Christians and Jews (apart from one case of egregious treachery by the latter at the beginning of Islam). The incredibly rapid expansion of the religion of Islam was due above all to persuasion, example, and especially to its inherent power of attraction, its Divine irresistibility. Here are some quotations from the writings of historians:

> Force had no part in the propagation of the Koran, for the Arabs always left those they conquered to keep their religion. . . . Far from being imposed by force, the Koran was spread only by persuasion. Persuasion alone could induce peoples who conquered the Arabs at a later date, such as the Turks and the Mongols, to adopt it.[2]
>
> (Gustave Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes* [*The Civilization of the Arabs*])

> Of any organized attempt to force the acceptance of Islam on the non-Muslim population, or of any systematic persecution to stamp out the Christian religion, we hear nothing. Had the early Caliphs

[2] Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1884.

> chosen to adopt either course of action, they might have swept away Christianity as easily as Ferdinand and Isabella drove Islam out of Spain.
>
> (Thomas W. Arnold,[3] *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*)[4]

> We see Muslim and Catholic princes not only allied, when the power of a dangerous co-religionist had to be curbed, but also aiding one another generously to suppress disorders and revolts. The reader will learn, no doubt to his surprise, that in one of the battles for the Caliphate of Córdoba in 1010 Catalan forces saved the situation, and on this occasion three bishops gave their lives for the "Prince of the Believers" (*amīr al-mu'minīn*). Al-Mansūr had in his entourage several counts who joined him with their troops, and the presence of Christian guards in the courts of Andalusia was by no means exceptional."
>
> (Ernst Kühnel, *Maurische Kunst* [*Moorish Art*])[5]

> In Muslim Spain, those who remained Christian were well treated, as they were throughout the Islamic Empire. Both Jews and Christians were regarded as "People of the Book", that is, as people who had their own holy writings, the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. In Córdoba, the Christians continued to worship in the Cathedral of Saint Vincent, though they were not allowed

[3] A nineteenth century Protestant missionary.

[4] Westminster: A. Constable & Co., 1896.

[5] Berlin: Cassirer, 1924.

to disturb the Muslims with hymn-singing or bell-ringing.

Muslims and Christians usually got on very well together, lived much the same life, and dressed alike. Muslims took pleasure in attending Christian celebrations and were frequent visitors at monasteries on saints' days. Even warfare did not divide them. Christians in Muslim Spain were loyal to the emir and fought for their Muslim ruler against the Christian kings of the north. In peacetime Christian kings sent their sons to be taught manners at the court of Córdoba. They married their daughters to Muslim princes and these brides became Muslims too.

Arabic language and literature fascinated Spanish Christians, as did Muslim architecture and science. A Christian of Córdoba named Álvaro wrote in 854: "Innumerable are the Christians who can express themselves in Arabic and compose poetry in that language with greater art than the Arabs themselves."

A popular recreation for rich and poor alike was getting together for picnics and garden parties. People in Córdoba had a passion for them and any occasion would do. Marriages and circumcisions—all Muslim boys were circumcised—called for splendid celebrations. Then there were the Muslim and Christian feast days. At the Christian feast of the Epiphany the whole population joined in the torch-lit processions that went on all night. There were saint's day pilgrimages to Christian monasteries where the monks gave lavish hospitality. . . . The feast days were great occasions."

(Duncan Townson, *Muslim Spain*)[6]

[6] Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

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In my opening paragraph, I said that, amongst the world religions, Islam is unique as regards the degree of tolerance which, throughout history, it has shown towards non-Muslim religions, especially Christianity and Judaism. Some evidence to this effect has been given above; but now I will change tack.

It is said that two wrongs don't make a right. How true! Nevertheless, two wrongs—indeed many wrongs—immediately remove the allegedly *unique* nature of the "wrongness" commonly attributed to Islam.

As regards intolerance and violence, how does Christianity shape up? Shall we start with the Inquisition, the cruel burning at the stake of untold numbers of heretics, the marauding crusaders, the wars of religion, the aggression against Eastern Orthodoxy by Catholics, against Catholics by Protestants, against Jews by Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants alike?

Albert the Great, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and many others amongst the great Christian figures in history, spoke extremely negatively about the Jews; and so, for that matter, does the New Testament (in both the Gospels and the Apocalypse). Islamic lore also contains examples of similar attitudes and statements. In both religions, the fundamental reason for this is theological, namely the Jews' rejection of the Messiah.

There is much talk nowadays along the lines of: "*Their* God ('Allah') is vengeful; *our* God ('Jehovah') is merciful." One would like to refer people who speak thus to the Koran and the Bible, for they are clearly ignorant of both. I will quote from the Koran later, but as regards the Bible, see Exodus 22:20; 32:26-28; Deuteronomy 7:2; 13:15-16; 20:13; 20:16-17; 22:20-21; 28:23-26; 32:41-42; Joshua 10:40; Judges 21:10. Merciless massacres, and

exterminations of whole tribes, were commanded by God. In a divinely sanctioned act, Samson killed himself and three thousand people with him (Judges 16:25-30; Mark 6:11; Jude 5). Jesus himself exhibited anger on many occasions, and spoke repeatedly of hellfire.

Perhaps at this point I need to say the obvious: there is only one God, whatever He may be called! The Arabic word for God is "Allah". Protestants in particular seem to be unaware that Christians all over the Near-East refer to God as "Allah".

Saladin's career is known in detail. It is through this, that he acquired his reputation for exemplary chivalry, a reputation which has lasted from his own time to the present. Sir Walter Scott, for example, eulogizes him in his novel *The Talisman.*

When one surveys comprehensively and objectively the whole historical scene, one can soon observe that the Muslim record regarding non-Muslim populations is manifestly better than that of Christians in analogous situations. One example from the Middle Ages: when in 1097, during the first crusade (1095-1099), the crusaders captured Jerusalem, they indiscriminately killed *all* of its inhabitants, men, women, and children; Muslims, Jews, and the large population of non-Catholic Christians. It was said that the city was knee-high in blood.

After ninety years of crusader rule, the Muslims, under the command of Saladin, re-captured Jerusalem in 1187, following the fierce and bloody battle of Hattin, a battle to the death if there ever was one. Two crusader leaders were captured: Guy de Lusignon and Raynald de Châtillon. In this connection, Saladin declared: "It is not the wont of kings to kill kings." Accordingly, the life of Guy was spared, but Raynald de Châtillon was executed, because he had earlier attacked and killed a group of unarmed Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca.

After the battle, according to the historian Bahā ad-Dīn Shaddād,[7] Saladin ordered the execution of every single member of the military monastic orders that had fought against the Muslims (except for the Grand Master of the Temple); it is further said that this execution of the Knights Templars and Hospitallers was carried out by Sufis. May be; but this is completely foreign to Sufis and Sufism as known throughout the ages, and as attested to by the three unimpeachable authorities on Sufism, Reynold Nicholson, Arthur Arberry, and Annemarie Schimmel.[8]

Dismaying as the execution of the members of the military monastic orders is (if the account is true, it was spiritual men killing spiritual men), it may be that it harbors an underlying symbolic and poetic justice, which would differentiate it sharply from the insensate massacres, in modern times, of twenty million Christians by Stalin, twenty million Buddhists by Mao, and six million Jews by Hitler.[9] In connection with Saladin's action, it may also be appropriate to recall that, in several books of the Bible, as also in the Koran, God commanded the massacre of individuals, groups, and whole tribes.

Quite other, and more positively symbolic, is the fact that, when Saladin's troops entered Jerusalem, *no one*, were he Catholic, Eastern Christian, or Jew, was killed.

[7] His laudatory biography of Saladin, of whom he was a personal friend, bears the quaint title *Sultanly Anecdotes and Josephly Virtues.* The English translation, under the title *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin* is still in print.

[8] I comment on this more fully in my book *What do the Religions say about Each Other? Christian Attitudes towards Islam, Islamic Attitudes towards Christianity* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008).

[9] The number killed after Hattin was around 230.

The Catholics, indeed, were given a free passage out of the city. The Eastern Christians and the Jews remained.

Soon after Ferdinand and Isabella completed the *reconquista* in 1492 by capturing the remaining Muslim province of Granada, the Muslims and Jews there were either expelled or forcibly converted. Cardinal Richelieu in Paris later declared that these persecutions and expulsions, which involved horrendous cruelty, were amongst the most barbarous actions ever recorded in human history.

The Spanish in South and Central America and the Americans (i.e. the British) in North America were scarcely paragons of Gandhian non-violence. Nevertheless, the indigenous people who became Christians were generally pious. I have heard it said that in their Indian colony of Goa, the Portuguese solved the annoying problem of religious plurality by massacring the Muslims and forcibly converting the Hindus! The Spaniards imposed Christianity in the Philippines.[10]

As for the Hindus: from the seventh to eleventh centuries, they subjected Buddhists to severe persecution. Because of this persecution, and also because of a resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism was almost completely driven out of India.

Anyone familiar with the blood-stained histories of China, Japan, and Tibet can see how readily Buddhists ignored and pushed aside the tenets of their allegedly "peaceful" religion.

As for the Red Man: the tribes were ceaselessly on the warpath and engaged in much cruelty.[11]

[10] In all fairness, it must be said that the Goans and the Filipinos became devoted and pious Catholics.

[11] It is right to oppose the role played by missionaries but, with regard to Red Indian cruelty, Frithjof Schuon has said that

To end this section, let me make the important point that the modern "Christian" toleration of non-Christian religions is almost entirely due to indifference: the fact that nowadays the overwhelming majority of people in the West do not take religion seriously. Christianity has been *de facto* replaced by humanism. As indicated above, when Christianity was taken seriously—or when it was in a position of power—the situation was quite different. Today's much vaunted "freedom of religion" does not come from Christianity, but from modern humanism and religious indifference. On the contrary, Christianity (like every other authentic religion) spurns the alleged benefits of humanism, and asks, in the words of Christ, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

As regards the question of cruel punishments, this was by no means exclusive to Islam: it was absolutely universal. In the Old Testament, for example, it is repeatedly ordained that adultery be punished by stoning, and on one occasion, it ordains burning. Without giving any further examples—

the Indians *needed* Christ (if not the missionaries!); and that it was through Christ that they renounced this form of savagery—without of course renouncing the religion of the Sun Dance and the Sacred Pipe (See Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun* [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1991], p. 42). How could the Indians learn about Christ without the missionaries? They did learn about Christ from the missionaries, but the missionaries' intention was to obtain total and exclusive "conversion" to the denomination concerned, and total extirpation of the indigenous religion and languages. Also, the missionaries and the civil authorities treated the Indians and their children most cruelly. However, the missionaries were not the only Christian presence; there were often honest White farmers nearby. These people would sometimes bring their sick children and other relatives to the last day of the Sun Dance to be healed by the leader of the Sun Dance and by the spiritual power of the Sacred Lodge.

this would be an altogether too horrifying exercise—it is enough to record that cruel punishments were present in *every* religious civilization. In Christianity, there have been terrible examples right up to the eighteenth century, if indeed not beyond. At the doctrinal level, we may note that the traditional Catholic prayer of contrition refers the need to avoid "God's dreadful punishments".

I refrain from speaking at length of the unspeakable present age. As far as it is concerned, we have little alternative but to be resigned; we know that whatever happens in these end times happens because it is the will of God. "There must needs be scandal" (Matt. 18.7).

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And what about Islam's oppression of women? Let us first look at the Bible:

> And the Lord God said unto the woman: Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.
>
> Gen. 3:16

> The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. . . . Man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.
>
> I Cor. 11:3, 7-9

> Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

> Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.
>
> Eph. 5:22-24

> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak: but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.
>
> I Cor. 14:34-35

> I will therefore that women adorn themselves in modest apparel. . . . Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed and then Eve. Nevertheless, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.
>
> I Tim. 2:8, 11-15

It is only fair to add that both traditional Judaism and traditional Christianity accorded a noble and sacred role to women.

Before terminating this list of traditional Western attitudes towards women, we may also recall the words of Aristotle: "As to the indulging of women in any particular liberties, it is hurtful to the end of government and the prosperity of the city" (*Politics*, Bk. 2, Chap. IX, 1269b12).

What then is Islam's attitude towards women? Are we going to say that the attitude of Islam is "better" (less rigorous) than the Biblical and Aristotelian ones? No; that would not be true. It may well be that, in the many

Islamic countries between Morocco and Indonesia, the situation is similar—slightly "less rigorous" in some cases, slightly "more rigorous" in others. (I am still referring to a comparison with the Biblical attitude, not with that of Europe since the Enlightenment.) As far as Morocco is concerned, it seems that the situation of the Berber women in the Atlas region is less rigorous and less formalistic than that of the Arab women. (I have to say however that I have seen, and met, what I must call "happy and contented" women in Arab areas of Morocco.) The Berber women in Chaouen in the Rif region, swathed in white, glide through the town like angels![12] A similar freedom for women can be seen among the Bedouin people, where women enjoy a good status. One can also note that the Muslim women of Black Africa (both East and West), in their proud demeanor and colorful—and not particularly puritan—costumes, seem to enjoy a status somewhat different from that of women in other Islamic countries.

Let me now turn directly to the shame and horror of a degenerate and perverted Islam. I refer to the abominable plight of women in a certain sector of Islam notoriously characterized by Afghanistan and similar areas. Here the servitude and indignity inflicted on women is egregious. A particularly apparent aspect of this oppression is the grotesque form of dress which women are constrained to wear—a dress which covers them in black from head to foot, with only a slit for the eyes. The sheer ugliness of this attire indicates only too clearly the degree of the deviation concerned. All this may be part of the world of Islam—Islam in a particularly aberrant and distorted form—but it is not the crystalline world of mercy and beauty that is

[12] I speak of Morocco as it was on my visits there in the 1950s and 1960s. I don't doubt that it has changed much since then.

the world of the Koran and the world of Mohammed.[13] Unhappily, because of the malignant growth of "Islamic fundamentalism" in recent times, this deformed Islam is now in a position to menace each and every country in the Islamic world. Frithjof Schuon has observed how this fundamentalism "monstrously combines Muslim formalism with modernist ideologies and tendencies".[14] One can think, for example, of Khomeini's "Islamic revolution" in Iran and Gadhafi's "Islamic republic" in Libya. Examples of enlightened Islamic civilization may be found in Moorish Spain (particularly under Abd ar-Rahman III and other Umayyads) and in Mughal India (particularly under Akbar and others amongst the great Mughals). In these two lands, there was not only splendor in the arts, there were also peaks of wisdom and piety. There were saints and philosophers in both countries. One can mention in particular Ibn 'Arabī in Spain and Mu'īn ad-Dīn Chishtī in India.

Regarding the principles and ideals of the Islamic attitude towards women, one may cite the following passages from Frithjof Schuon:

> The genesis of a religion amounts to the creation of a new moral and spiritual type; in Islam, this type consists in the equilibrium between

[13] Speaking thus of Mohammed may elicit the objection: "but Mohammed was at war nearly all the time." Yes, and so was the author of the Psalms; one might wonder if King David ever spent more than a moment in his palace in Jerusalem. The fact is that David and Mohammed were both engaged in the "lesser", as well as the "greater", holy war. See pp. 39-40.

[14] Frithjof Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1989), p. 228.

contemplativeness and combativeness, and between holy poverty and sanctified sexuality. The Arab—and the man Arabized by Islam—has, so to speak, four poles: the desert, the sword, woman, and religion. For the contemplative, these poles become inward: the desert, the sword, and woman become so many states or functions of the soul. . . .

The sword represents death, the death one deals and the death one risks; its perfume is always present. Woman represents an analogous reciprocity; she is the love one receives and the love one gives, and thus she incarnates all the generous virtues; she compensates for the perfume of death with that of life. The profoundest meaning of the sword is that there is no nobility without a renunciation of life. . . . The symbiosis of love and death, within the framework of poverty and in the face of the Absolute, constitutes all that is essential in Arab nobility. . . .[15]

The Saracens renounced the conquest of Toledo because the queen of this city appeared on the ramparts to tell the assailants that her husband the king was absent. In this case, chivalric honor also enters into play; one does not wish to

[15] As regards the pole "death", it is similar in Christianity: here death is present in three forms: the knight or warrior who is ready to kill or be killed for the sake of truth or honor; the monk who renounces the lay life and his individual freedom by taking the monastic vow of "poverty, chastity, and obedience"; and, above all, the martyr, who eagerly seeks martyrdom, and willingly dies for Christ. Christ said: "He that loses his life for my sake, shall find it" (Matt. 16:25) and also: "I came not to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

> proceed against a frail woman, even though she be surrounded by warriors.[16]

> Rumi observes, with finesse and profundity, and not without humor, that the sage is conquered by woman, whereas the fool conquers her; for the latter is brutalized by his passion and knows neither the *baraka* [spiritual blessing] of love nor delicate sentiments, whereas the sage sees in the lovable woman a ray from God, and in the feminine body an image of creative power.[17]

In view of its veneration for the Virgin Mary ("the Immaculate Conception"), and from the time of Khadija, Fatima, and Ayesha[18] onwards, Islam accords an honorable and sacred role to women. There is more in the Koran about the Virgin Mary than in the New Testament. One of the chapters in the Koran is named after her.

Mohammed's view of motherhood is revealed in the following incident:

> A man asked Mohammed: "O Messenger of God, who has the greatest right to my companionship in good spirit?" Mohammed replied: "Thy mother." The man asked again: "Then who?" He answered: "Thy mother." Again the man asked: "Then who?" He answered: Thy mother." Once

[16] *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), pp. 115, 117.

[17] *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 53n.

[18] Khadija and Ayesha were wives of Mohammed, and Fatima was his daughter.

more he asked: "Then who?" Mohammed said: "Thy father."

Christians are disconcerted by the fact that Mohammed had eleven wives. This offends their sensibility because the Christian sacrament of Holy Matrimony envisages only the union of "one man and one woman".[19] By way of explanation, one must again have recourse to the Bible and the Hebrew prophets. David, Solomon, and others amongst the prophets, had a very large number of wives, while remaining entirely within the will of God (despite the denials of this last point by many Evangelical preachers). Christianity, situated historically between Judaism and Islam, is the exception in the Semitic cycle. At any rate, it is a fact that the polygamy of the Hebrew prophets does not unduly trouble the majority of Christians. Analogously to "double standards", one could perhaps speak here of "double sensibilities".

In the wake, therefore, of this long-standing Semitic tradition, Muslims too are allowed multiple wives—in their case up to four (though, in fact, very few of them have more than one). According to Islamic teaching, Mohammed, for political, religious, and personal reasons, received divine authority to exceed this number.

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The dreadful events and developments of the last few years have caused the Western public to ask, more or less for the first time: what kind of religion is Islam? Those good people who seek conciliation reply that Islam is

[19] I will not comment on the blasphemies and immoralities of the age we live in.

"a religion of peace".[20] Well, yes, and so is every other religion, although we must not forget that Christ said: "I came not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34)—and that a principle analogous to this is also present in every religion.

Much more importantly, every religion claims to be, first and foremost, "a religion of truth". In the words of Christ, it is truth that "sets you free" (John 8:32). Thus every religion makes the dual claim to be a vehicle of truth, and a provider of a means of salvation. Were it not so, it would not be a religion, but a man-made ideology, with no ability to save anyone. Truth and a means of salvation are the defining characteristics of a religion.

Islam is characterized by what are called the "five pillars". These are: faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage. Faith (*īmān*) that "there is no god but God"; prayer (*salāt*) five times a day; fasting (*saum*) during the holy month of Ramadan; almsgiving (*zakāt*) "to the poor, the widows, and the orphans"; and pilgrimage (*hajj*)—once in a life-time, if it is possible—to the Abrahamic "black stone" in the Kaaba in Mecca. As is well known, *jihād* (holy war) is also an important feature. According to Mohammed, the fight against idolaters is the "lesser holy war"; the fight against our own souls is the "greater holy war". This is the teaching of every religion. In Christianity, for example, it is known as the "spiritual combat"

[20] Islam is pre-eminently a "religion of peace". The very name indicates this: *islām* (resignation to the will of God) engenders *salām* (peace). The universal greeting of Islam is *salām* (peace). "Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Verily God loveth not aggressors" (Koran, *Sūra* "The Cow", 2:190).

Islam is also a religion of mercy: every chapter of the Koran except one begins with the words: "In the Name of God the Clement, the Merciful".

(Lorenzo Scupoli) or "unseen warfare" (the *Philokalia*). In Hinduism, it is the battlefield of Kurukshetra (as described in the *Bhagavad Gītā*).[21]

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Muslim zealots are no better than Christian zealots. The latter, throughout the centuries and down to the present day, are to be found in all of the three great Christian sectors: Eastern Orthodoxy (the Serbs against Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo; the persisting spirit of "EOKA" [the Greek Cypriot terrorist organization] or *enosis* [the desired union of Cyprus with Greece] against the Turks in Cyprus); Roman Catholicism (the Crusader sacking of Constantinople, the massive killing of Eastern Christians by the Crusaders, the massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day in France, the IRA in Northern Ireland); and Protestantism (the fanatical and violent element amongst the "Covenanters", the cruel witch hunting, the Protestant terrorists in Northern Ireland, and the attitude of many of the "religious right" in the United States).

It is often emphasized that the Islamic terrorists are anti-Christian. This is indeed the case; but what is not so tirelessly reiterated is that these evil men's mayhem is also directed against fellow-Muslims. They indeed are the first victims. There have been many lethal attacks by Islamic terrorists in Indonesia, Morocco, Jordan, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslim countries. It would be far from the truth to say that the terrorism in Muslim countries is only directed against tourists. It is directed against all Muslims who fail to adopt the terrorist ideology and who remain faithful to the traditional religion of

[21] For another reference to the difference in structure between Christianity and Islam, see p. 55.

Islam; all such people are potential targets. In this way the terrorists have caused widespread intimidation. In the case of Iraq the violence has been between opposing sects.

The media of publicity frequently and rightly draw attention to the sufferings of the people of Darfur in Sudan, but it is seldom mentioned that these hapless victims of a malevolent government are Muslims.

Many Orientals of all religions have a distaste for the manifest and grotesque decadence of Western "culture" and mores; but Arabs and other Muslims have an additional ground for complaint. I refer to the fact that, during the twentieth century, the Islamic world was subjected to certain major injustices of which the majority of people in the West are not even aware. It is precisely this unawareness that is the cause of such pain and bitterness throughout the populations of the Muslim world. An analogy: though the world was uncaring and indifferent, all Germans were aware of the fundamental injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, but this did not make them responsible for the misdeeds of Hitler, who was able to exploit this awareness for his own evil ends. In like manner, the Muslim peoples are aware of the injustices referred to, but are not thereby responsible for the actions of the terrorists.

In the face of man's callous injustice—not excusable simply because it is often unconscious—one can obtain profound solace in the words of Longfellow: "The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small." The Romans said that "Truth is the daughter of time" (*Veritas filia temporis*) and, according to an ancient English proverb: "Truth will out."[22] If the perpetrators of injustice knew what these sayings mean, it would send shivers up and down their spine!

[22] See also 1 Esdras 4:41, quoted on p. 34.

As for "Islamic terrorists", it is they, seeking bloody revenge and imbued with ideological fundamentalism, who are both the cause and the perpetuation of the regrettable "Islamophobia" which is now widespread in the West. That the Western public conflates terrorism and Islam is the lamentable achievement of the "Islamic terrorists".

It is frequently alleged that Islam wants to convert the whole world to Islam. The reader, who has got this far in my discourse, may be surprised when I unhesitatingly concur! For this is indeed the case, and I can say it without a qualm, because it is exactly the same with Christianity and Buddhism. Unlike Hinduism and Judaism (each one being "the religion of a people", and seeking no converts), Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are "universal religions" (each one seeking converts in all nations); it is thus quite inevitable that there be competition between them. Nevertheless, each of these three religions is in fact located chiefly in a particular area of the world which, in a sense, has become its providential home. Buddhism originated in India, but virtually disappeared from that country, and took root in Tibet, China, Japan, and many other countries of South-East Asia. Christianity originated in a Jewish context, but took root principally amongst the Greeks, Romans, Germanics, Celts, and Slavs. Islam originated in Arabia, but, beyond the Arab world, it spread to Turkey, Persia, a portion of India, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

That this territorial distribution is not entirely a matter of chance is strongly suggested by the fact that the empire of Julius Caesar became, largely, the cradle for Christianity, and the empire of Alexander became, largely, the cradle for Islam. Caesar is mentioned in the Gospels, and Alexander is mentioned in the Koran.

Here are two Koranic verses which make specific reference to the plurality of religions:

> O Mankind! We created you from a single pair, a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other).
>
> *Sūra* "The Apartments", 49:13

> Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you by that which He has given you. So compete with one another in good works. Every one of you will return to God and He will inform you about the things wherein you differed.
>
> *Sūra* "The Table", 5:48

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The choice of Koranic verses and sayings of Mohammed that are quoted in the hostile books and articles published today are carefully selected so as to include everything and anything that can be given a negative interpretation; they bypass the numerous and unmistakably clear expressions of Islamic tolerance, such as the following:

> You will find that the best friends of believers [i.e. Muslims] are those who say: "We are Christians." This is because there are priests and monks amongst them, and because they are not proud.
>
> *Sūra* "The Table", 5:82

> O People of the Book! Ye have no faith until ye observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been revealed unto you by your Lord.
>
> *Sūra* "The Table", 5:68

O People of the Book! Come now to a word common to us and you, so that we worship none but God.

Sūra "The Family of Imran", 3:64

Verily, those who believe [i.e. Muslims], those who are Jews, Sabeans, and Christians, and whosoever believeth in the Last Day and doeth good: no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.

Sūra "The Table", 5:69

Were it not that God had repelled some men by means of others, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of God is invoked, would assuredly have been destroyed.[23]

Sūra "The Pilgrimage", 22:40

Every son of Adam at birth is touched by Satan, save only the son of Mary and his mother.

Hadīth

If anyone testifies that there is no god but God, who alone has no partner, that Mohammed is His servant and messenger, that Jesus is His servant and messenger, the son of His handmaid, His Word which He cast into Mary and a Spirit from Him, and that Paradise and hell are real, then God will cause him to enter Paradise no matter what he has done.

Hadīth

[23] This translation is based on the English version of the Koran by Muhammad Asad. Elsewhere preference has generally been given to Marmaduke Pickthall's translation.

> Whosoever cheats a non-Muslim citizen, or usurps his possessions, I shall be his prosecutor on the Day of Judgement.
>
> *Hadīth*

On the basis of these fundamental Islamic criteria, it can be said, without wasting words, that the so-called "Islamic terrorists" are not Muslims, just as, on the basis of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, it can be said that the five post-Vatican-II "popes" are not Catholics. It might well be asked: if this be true, why don't either ordinary Muslims or the Islamic authorities speak up and condemn terrorism? The systematically overlooked fact is that many of them have done and continue to do so. On the other hand, it must also be said that in most countries the terrorists have succeeded overwhelmingly in intimidating the Islamic community. In such a situation it is only human nature to keep silent.

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The calumnies of the contemporary media are based on pre-existing prejudice and systematic bad will. Authors of defamations of this sort appear to have no concern for truth and absolutely no awareness that they are dealing with one of the great religions of the world.

Apocalyptic Note

In this connection, it must not be overlooked that we are living in the end times. The Hindus say that we have been in the *Kali-Yuga* (the "Dark Age")[24] for millennia.

[24] For details regarding the "Four Ages" of Hinduism, see p. 6, fn. 4.

The whole of the *Kali-Yuga* is an age of lies, violence, and cruelty, and now more so than ever, since we appear to be in its last phases.

Everyone knows that war is hell. In war, combatants have never treated one another very nicely. In the past, people fought with ancient weapons; now with mechanized slaughter and indiscriminate destruction from the air; but, in the "dark age", wars will always occur. People fight for causes good or bad; angelic or demonic; for causes supported with truth or with lies; for causes made plain or for causes kept hidden. But one thing is certain: when people rush to judgement on these matters, double standards immediately and shamelessly come into play.

We know that, in these days, the evil one has free rein. He has dealt well-nigh death-blows to all the religions: The Vatican II Council and the Islamic "fundamentalism" are two examples, but the other religions have, in one form or another, undergone analogous injury.

It is sometimes hard to believe the verse: *Magna est veritas et praevalebit* ("Truth is great and it shall prevail." I Esdras 4:41). But, despite an unremitting barrage of mendacious propaganda and apparently endless killing, it is true.

One can take solace in the verse: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). These apocalyptic words of Christ apply *mutatis mutandis* within all of the great religions.

An understanding of what the end times involve is an important key to understanding the past and present misdeeds of religion.

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