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Reflections on Islam and Modern Life

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Few subjects arouse more passion and debate among Muslims today than the encounter between Islam and modern thought. The subject is of course vast and embraces fields ranging from politics to sacred art, subjects whose debate often causes volcanic eruptions of emotions and passions and vituperations which hardly lead to an objective analysis of causes and a clear vision of the problems involved.

Nor is this debate which consumes so much of the energies of Muslims and students of Islam helped by the lack of clear definition of the terms of the debate and an insight into the actual forces involved.

The whole discussion is also paralyzed by a psychological sense of inferiority and a sense of enfeeblement before the modern world which prevents most modernized Muslims from making a critical appraisal of the situation and of stating the truth irrespective of the fact whether it is fashionable and acceptable to current opinion or not. Let us then begin be defining what we mean by modern thought.

It is amazing how many hues and shades of meaning have been given to the terms “modern” ranging from contemporary to simply “innovative”, “creative”, or in tune with the march of time. The question of principles and in fact the truth itself is hardly ever taken into consideration when modernism is discussed.

One hardly ever asks whether this or that idea or form or institution conforms to some aspect of the truth. The only question is whether it is modern or not. The lack of clarity, precision and sharpness of both mental and artistic contours, which characterizes the modern world itself, seem to plague the contemporary Muslim's understanding of modernism whether he wishes to adopt its tenets or even to react against it. The influence of modernism seems to have dimmed that lucidity and blurred that crystalline transparency which distinguish traditional Islam in both its intellectual and artistic manifestations.[1]

When we use the term “modern”, we mean neither contemporary nor up-to-date nor successful in the conquest and domination of the natural world. Rather, for us “modern” means that which is cut off from

the transcendent, from the immutable principles which in reality govern all things and which are made known to man through revelation in its most universal sense.

Modernism is thus contrasted with tradition (*al-din*); the latter implies all that which is of Divine Origin along with its manifestations and deployments on the human plane while the former by contrast implies all that is merely human and now ever more increasingly subhuman, and all that is divorced and cut off from the Divine Source.2

Obviously, tradition has always accompanied and in fact characterized human existence whereas modernism is a very recent phenomenon. As long as man has lived on earth, he has buried his dead and believed in the after life and the world of the Spirit. During the "hundreds of thousands" of years of human life on earth, he has been traditional in outlook and has not "evolved" as far as his relation with God and nature seen as the creation and theophany of God are concerned.3

Compared to this long history during which man has continuously celebrated the Divine and performed his function as God's vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth, the period of the domination of modernism stretching from the Renaissance in Western Europe in the 15th century to the present day appears as no more than the blinking of an eye.4

Yet, it is during this fleeting moment that we live; hence the apparent dominance of the power of modernism before which so many Muslims retreat in helplessness or which they join with a superficial sense of happiness that accompanies the seduction of the world.

A word must also be said about the term "thought" as it appears in the expression modern thought. The term thought as used in this context is itself modern rather than traditional. The Arabic term *fikr* or the Persian *andishah*, which are used as its equivalence, hardly appear with the same meaning in traditional texts. In fact what would correspond to the traditional understanding of the term would be more the French *pensée* as used by a Pascal, a term which can be better rendered as meditation rather than thought.

Both *fikr* and *andishah* are in fact related to meditation and contemplation rather than to a purely human and therefore non-divine mental activity which the term thought usually evokes.5 If then we nevertheless use the term thought, it is because we are addressing an audience nurtured on all that this term implies and are using a medium and language in which it is not possible, without being somewhat contrite, to employ another term with the same range of meaning embracing many forms of mental activity but devoid of the limitation in the vertical sense that the term "thought" possesses in contemporary parlance.

All these forms of mental activity which together comprise modern thought and which range from science to philosophy, psychology and even certain aspects of religion itself, possess certain common characteristics and traits which must be recognized and studied before the Islamic response to modern thought can be provided. Perhaps the first basic trait of modern thought to be noted is its anthropomorphic nature. How can a form of thought which negates any principle higher than man be but

anthropomorphic?

It might of course be objected that modern science is certainly not anthropomorphic but that rather it is the pre-modern sciences which must be considered as man-centered. Despite appearances, however, this assertion is mere illusion if one examines closely the epistemological factor involved. It is true that modern science depicts a universe in which man as spirit, mind and even, psyche has no place and the Universe thus appears as "inhuman" and not related to the human state.

But it must not be forgotten that although modern man has created a science which excludes the reality of man from the general picture of the Universe,[6] the criteria and instruments of knowledge which determine this science are merely and purely human. It is the human reason and the human senses which determine modern science. The knowledge of even the farthest galaxies are held in the human mind.

This scientific world from which man has been abstracted is, therefore, nevertheless based on an anthropomorphic foundation as far as the subjective pole of knowledge, the subject who knows and determines what science is, is concerned.

In contrast, the traditional sciences were profoundly non anthropomorphic in the sense that for them the locus and container of knowledge was not the human mind but ultimately the Divine Intellect. True science was not based on purely human reason but on the Intellect which belongs to the supra-human level of reality yet illuminates the human mind.[7]

If medieval cosmologies placed man at the center of things it is not because they were humanistic in the Renaissance sense of the term according to which terrestrial and fallen man was the measure of all things but it was to enable man to gain a vision of the cosmos as a crypt through which he must travel and which he must transcend. And certainly one cannot begin a journey from anywhere except where one is.[8]

If the characteristic of anthropomorphism is thus to be found in modern science, it is to be seen in an even more obvious fashion in other forms and aspects of modern thought whether it be psychology, anthropology or philosophy. Modern thought, of which philosophy is in a sense the father and progenitor, became profoundly anthropomorphic the moment man was made the criterion of reality.

When Descartes uttered "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*), he placed his individual awareness of his own limited self as the criterion of existence for certainly the "I" in Descartes assertion was not meant to be the Divine "I" who through Hallaj exclaimed "I am the Truth" (*ana'l-Haqq*), the Divine "I" which according to traditional doctrines alone has the right to say "I".[9]

Until Descartes, it was Pure Being, the Being of God which determined human existence and the various levels of reality. But with Cartesian rationalism individual human existence became the criterion of reality and also the truth. In the mainstream of Western thought, and excluding certain peripheral developments

ontology gave way to epistemology, epistemology to logic; and finally by way of reaction logic became confronted with those anti-rational "philosophies" so prevalent today.[10]

What happened in the post-medieval period in the West was that higher levels of reality became eliminated on both the subjective and the objective domains. There was nothing higher in man than his reason and nothing higher in the objective world than what that reason could comprehend with the help of the normal human senses.

This was of course bound to happen if one remembers the well-known principle of adequation (the *adaequatio* of St. Thomas Aquinas) according to which to know anything there must be an instrument of knowledge adequate and conforming to the nature of that which is to be known. And since modern man refused to accept a principle higher than himself, obviously all that issued from his mind and thought could not but be anthropomorphic.

A second trait of modernism, closely related to anthropomorphism, is the lack of principles which characterizes the modern world. Human nature is too unstable, changing and turbulent to be able to serve as the principle for something. That is why a mode of thinking which is not able to transcend the human level and which remains anthropomorphic cannot but be devoid of principles.

In the realm of the life of action, namely the domain of morality (although morality cannot be reduced simply to action) and, from another point of view, politics and economics, everyone senses this lack of principles. But one might object that principles do exist as far as the sciences are concerned. Here again, however, it must be asserted that neither empiricism nor validification through induction nor yet reliance upon the data of the senses as confirmed by reason can serve as principles in the metaphysical sense.

They are all valid in their own level as is the science created by them. But they are divorced from immutable principles as is modern science which has discovered many things on a certain level of reality but because of its divorce from higher principles has brought about disequilibrium through its very discoveries and inventions. Only mathematics among the modern sciences may be said to possess certain principles in the metaphysical sense.

The reason is that mathematics remains, despite everything, a Platonic science and its laws discovered by the human mind continue to reflect metaphysical principles as reason itself cannot but display the fact that it *is* a reflection, even if a dim one, of the Intellect. The discoveries of the other sciences, to the extent that they conform to some aspect of the nature of reality, of course possess a symbolic and metaphysical significance, but that does not mean that these sciences are attached to metaphysical principles and integrated into a higher form of knowledge.

Such an integration could take place but as a matter of fact it has not. Modern science, therefore, and its generalizations, like other fruits of that way of thinking and acting which we have associated with modernism, suffer from the lack of principles which characterize the modern world, a lack which is felt to

an even greater degree as the history of the modern world unfolds.

It might be asked what other means of knowledge were available to other civilizations before the modern period. The answer is quite clear at least for those Muslims who know the intellectual life of Islam: revelation and intellectual intuition or vision (*dhawq*, *kashf* or *shuhud*).[11]

The Muslim intellectual saw revelation as the primary source of knowledge not only as the means to learn the laws of morality concerned with the active life. He was also aware of the possibility for man to purify himself until the "eye of the heart" (*'ayn al-qalb*), residing at the center of his being, would open and enable him to gain the direct vision of the supernal realities.

Finally he accepted the power of reason to know, but this reason was always attached to and derived sustenance from revelation on the one hand and intellectual intuition on the other. The few in the Islamic world who would cut this cord of reliance and declare the independence of reason from both revelation and intuition were never accepted into the mainstream of Islamic thought.

They remained marginal figures while in a reverse fashion in the post-medieval West those who sought to sustain and uphold the reliance of reason upon revelation and the Intellect remained on the margin while the mainstream of modern Western thought rejected both revelation and intellectual intuition as means of knowledge.

In modern times even philosophers of religion and theologians rarely defend the Bible as a source of a sapiental knowledge which could determine and integrate *scientia* in the manner of a St. Bonaventure.

The few who look upon the Bible for intellectual guidance are usually limited by such shallow literal interpretations of the Holy Book that in their feuds with modern sciences the rationalistic camp comes out almost inevitably as the victor.

When one ponders over these and other salient features of modernism, one comes to the conclusion that in order to understand modernism and its manifestations, it is essential to comprehend the conception of man which underlies it. One must seek to discover how modern man conceives of himself and his destiny, how he views the *anthropos vis-à-vis* God and the world.

Moreover, it is essential to understand what constitutes the soul and mind of men and women whose thoughts and ideas have molded and continue to mold the modern world. For surely if such men as Ghazzali and Rumi or for that matter an Erigena or Eckhardt were the occupants of the chairs of philosophy in leading universities in the West another kind of philosophy would issue forth in this part of the world.

A man thinks according to what he is, or as Aristotle said, knowledge depends upon the mode of the knower. A study of the modern concept of man as being "free" of Heaven, complete master of his own destiny, earth-bound but also master of the earth, oblivious to all eschatological realities which he has

replaced with some future state of perfection in profane historical time, indifferent if not totally opposed to the world of the Spirit and its demands and lacking a sense of the sacred will reveal how futile have been and are the efforts of those modernistic Muslim “reformers” who have sought to harmonize Islam and modernism in the sense that we have defined it.

If we turn even a cursory glance at the Islamic conception of man, at the *homo islamicus*, we shall discover ,the impossibility of harmonizing this conception with that of modern man. 12

The *homo islamicus* is at once the slave of God (*al-'abd*) and His vicegerent on earth (*khalifatallah fi'l ard*). 13 He is not an animal which happens to speak and think but possesses a soul and spirit created by God. The *homo Islamicus* contains within himself the plant and animal natures as he is the crown of creation (*ashraf al-makhluqat*) but he has not evolved from the lower forms of life.

Man has always been man. The Islamic conception of man envisages that man is a being who lives on earth and has earthly needs but he is not only earthly and his needs are not limited to the terrestrial. He rules over the earth but not in his own right, rather as God's vicegerent before all creatures. He therefore also bears responsibility for the created order before the Creator and is the channel of grace for God's creatures.

The *homo islamicus* possesses the power of reason, of *ratio* which divides and analyzes, but his mental faculties are not limited to reason. He also possesses the possibility of inward knowledge, the knowledge of his own inner being which is in fact the key to the knowledge of God according to the famous prophetic *hadith* “He who knows himself knoweth His Lord” (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*). He is aware of the fact that his consciousness does not have an “external, material cause but that it comes from God and is too profound to be affected by the accident of death. 14

The *homo islamicus* thus remains aware of the eschatological realities, of the fact that although he lives on this earth, he is here as a traveller far away from his original abode. He is aware that his guide for this journey is the message which issues from his home of origin *the* Origin, and this message is none other than revelation to which he remains bound not only in its aspect of law as embodied in the *Shari'ah* but also in its aspect of truth and knowledge (*Haqiqah*).

He is also aware that man's faculties are not bound and limited to the senses and reason but that to the extent that he is able to regain the fullness of his being and bring to actuality all the possibilities God has placed within him, man's mind and reason can become illuminated by the light of the spiritual and intelligible world to which the Holy Quran refers as the invisible (*'alam al-ghayb*). 15

Obviously such a conception of man differs profoundly from that of modern man who sees himself as a purely earthly creature, master of nature, but responsible to no one but himself and no amount of wishy-washy apologetics can harmonize the two. The Islamic conception of man removes the possibility of a Promethean revolt against Heaven and brings God into the minutest aspect of human life. 16

Its effect is therefore the creation of a civilization, an art, a philosophy or a whole manner of thinking and seeing things which is completely non-anthropomorphic but theocentric and which stands opposed to anthropomorphism which is such a salient feature of modernism. Nothing can be more shocking to authentic Muslim sensibilities than the Titanic and Promethean "religious" art of the late Renaissance and the Baroque which stand directly opposed to the completely non-anthropomorphic art of Islam.

Man in Islam thinks and makes in his function of *homo sapien* and *homo faber* as the *'abd* of God and not as a creature who has rebelled against Heaven. His function remains not the glorification of himself but of his Lord and his greatest aim is to become "nothing", to undergo the experience of *fana'* which would enable him to become the mirror in which God contemplates the reflections of His own Names and Qualities and the channel through which the theophanies of His Names and Qualities are reflected in the world.

Of course what characterizes the Islamic conception of man has profound similarities with the conception of man in other traditions including Christianity and we would be the last to deny this point. But modernism is *not* Christianity or any other tradition and it is the confrontation of Islam with modern thought that we have in mind and not its comparison with Christianity.

Otherwise what could be closer to the Islamic teaching that man is created to seek perfection and final spiritual beatitude through intellectual and spiritual growth, that man is man only when he seeks perfection (*talib al-kamal*) and attempts to go beyond himself than the scholastic saying *Homo non prorie humanus sed superhumanus est* (which means that to be properly human man must be more than human).

The characteristics of modern thought discussed earlier, namely its anthropomorphic and by extension secular nature, the lack of principles in various branches of modern thought and the reductionism which is related to it and which is most evident in the realm of the sciences are obviously in total opposition to the tenets of Islamic thought, as the modern conceception of man, from whom issue these thought patterns is opposed to the Islamic conception of man.

This opposition is clear enough not to need further elucidation here.[17] There is one characteristic of modern thought, however, which needs to be discussed in greater detail as a result of its pervasive nature in the modern world and its lethal effect upon the religious thought and life of those Muslims who have been affected by it, namely, the theory of evolution.[18]

In the West no modern theory or idea has been as detrimental to religion as the theory of evolution which instead of being taken as a hypothesis in biology, zoology, or paleontology, parades around as if it were a proven scientific fact. Furthermore, it has become a fashion of thinking embracing fields as far apart as astrophysics and the history of art. Nor has the effect of this manner of thinking been any less negative on Muslims affected by it than it has been on Christians.

Usually modernized Muslims have tried to come to terms with evolution through all kinds of unbelievable

interpretations of the Holy Quran forgetting that there is no way possible to harmonize the conception of man (Adam) to whom God taught all the “names” and whom He placed on earth as His *khalifah* and the evolutionist conception which sees man as “ascended” from the ape.

.theory of evolution on purely religious grounds, few Muslims have bothered to see its logical absurdity and all the scientific evidence brought against it by such men as L. Bounoure and D. Dewar[19], despite the ecstatic claims of its general acceptance by various standard dictionaries and encyclopedias.

In fact, as it has been stated so justly by E. F. Schumacher, “evolutionism is not science; it is science fiction, even a kind of hoax.”[20] Some Western critics of evolution have gone so far as to claim that its proponents suffer from psychological disequilibrium[21] while recently a whole array of arguments drawn from information theory have been brought against it.[22]

It is not our aim here to analyze and refute in detail the theory of evolution, although such a refutation by Muslim thinkers is essential from a scientific as well as metaphysical, logical and religious points of view as it has been already carried out in the Occident.

What is important to note here is that the evolutionary point of view which refuses to see permanence anywhere, for which the greater somehow “evolves” from the “lesser” and which is totally blind to the higher states of being and the archetypal realities which determine the forms of this world is but a result of that loss of principles alluded to above. Evolutionism is but a desperate attempt to fill the vacuum created by man's attempt to cut the hands of God from His creation and to negate any principle above the merely human which then falls of necessity to the level of the sub-human.

Once the Transcendent Principle is forgotten, the world becomes a circle without a center and this experience of the loss of the center remains an existential reality for anyone who accepts the theses of modernism, whether he be a Christian or a Muslim.

Closely allied to the idea of evolution is that of progress and utopianism which both philosophically and politically have shaken the Western world to its roots during the past two centuries and are now affecting the Islamic world profoundly.

The idea of unilateral progress has fortunately ceased to be taken seriously by many noted thinkers in the West today and is gradually being rejected in the Islamic world as an “idol of the mind” before which the earlier generation of modernized Muslims prostrated without any hesitation.[23]

But the utopianism which is closely related to the idea of progress bears further scrutiny and study as a result of the devastating effect it has had and continues to have on a large segment of the modernized Muslim “intelligentsia”.

Utopianism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as follows: “impossible ideal schemes for the amelioration of perfection of social conditions”. Although the origin of this term goes back to the well-

known treatise of Sir Thomas More entitled *Utopia* and written in 1516 in Latin, the term utopianism as employed today has certain implications ante-dating the 16th century although the term itself derives from More's famous work.

The Christian doctrine of the incarnation, combined with a sense of idealism which characterizes Christianity were of course present before modern times. Utopianism grafted itself upon the caricature of these characteristics and whether in the form of the humanitarian socialism or such figures as St. Simon, Charles Fourier or Robert Owen or the political socialism of Marx and Engels, led to a conception of history which is a real parody of the Augustinian City of God.

The utopianism of the last centuries, which is one of the important features of modernism, combined with various forms of Messianism led and still lead to deep social and political upheavals whose goals and methods cannot but remain completely alien to the ethos and aims of Islam.[24]

Utopianism seeks to establish a perfect social order through purely human means. It disregards the presence of evil in the world in the theological sense and aims at doing without God, as if it were possible to create an order based on goodness but removed from the source of all goodness.

Islam has also had its descriptions of the perfect stage or society in works as those of al-Farabi describing the *madinat al-fadilah* or the texts of Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi referring to the land of perfection which is called in Persian *na kuja-abad*, literally the land of nowhere, utopia. But then, it was always remembered that this land of perfection is nowhere, that is beyond the earthly abode and therefore identified with the eighth clime above the seven geographic ones.

The realism present in the Islamic perspective combined with the strong emphasis of the Holy Quran upon the gradual loss of perfection of the Islamic community as it moves away from the origin of revelation prevented the kind of utopianism present in modern European philosophy from growing upon the soil of Islamic thought. Moreover, the Muslim remained always aware that if there is to be a perfect state, it could only come into being through Divine help.

Hence, although the idea of the cyclic renewal of Islam through a “renewer” (*mujaddid*) has been always alive as has the wave of Mahdi'sm which sees in the Mahdi the force sent by God to return Islam to its perfection, Islam has never faced within itself that type of secular utopianism which underlies so much of the politico-social aspects of modern thought. It is therefore essential to be aware of the profound distinction between modern utopianism and Islamic teachings concerning the *mujaddid* or renewer of Islamic society or the Mahdi himself.

It is also basic to distinguish between the traditional figure of the *mujaddid* and the modern reformers who usually, as a result of their feeble reaction to modern thought, have hardly brought about the renewal of Islam.

There is finally one more characteristic of modern thought which is essential to mention and which is

related to all that has been stated above. This characteristic is the loss of the sense of the sacred. Modern man can practically be defined as that type of man who has lost the sense of the sacred, and modern thought is conspicuous in its lack of awareness of the sacred.

Nor could it be otherwise seeing that modern humanism is inseparable from secularism. But nothing could be further from the Islamic perspective in which there does not even exist such a concept as the profane or secular,25 for in Islam, as already mentioned, the One penetrates into the very depths of the world of multiplicity and leaves no domain outside the domain of tradition. This is to be seen not only in the intellectual aspects of Islam26 but also in a blinding fashion in Islamic art.

The Islamic tradition can never accept a thought pattern which is devoid of the perfume of the sacred and which replaces the Divine Order by one of a purely human origin and inspiration. The confrontation of Islam with modern thought cannot take place on a serious level if the primacy of the sacred in the perspective of Islam and its lack in modern thought is not taken into consideration. Islam cannot even carry out a dialogue with the secular by placing it in a position of legitimacy. It can only take the secular for what it is, namely the negation and denial of the sacred which ultimately alone *is* while the profane or secular only *appears* to be.

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention that the reductionism which is one of the characteristics of modern thought has itself affected Islam in its confrontation with modernism.

One of the effects of modernism upon Islam has been to reduce Islam in the minds of many to only one of its dimensions, namely the *Shari'ah*, and to divest it of those intellectual weapons which alone withstand the assault of modern thought upon the citadel of Islam. The *Shari'ah* is of course basic to the Islamic tradition; it is the ground upon which the religion is based.

But the intellectual challenges posed by modernism in the form of evolutionism, rationalism, existentialism, agnosticism and the like can only be answered intellectually and not juridically nor by ignoring or disregarding them and expecting some kind of magical wedding between the *Shari'ah* and modern science and technology.

The successful encounter of Islam with modern thought can only come about when modern thought is fully understood in both its roots and ramifications and the whole of the Islamic tradition brought to bear upon the solution of the enormous problems which modernism poses for Islam.

At the center of this undertaking lies the revival of that wisdom, that *hikmah* or *Haqiqah*, which lies at the heart of the Islamic revelation and which will remain valid as long as men remain men and bear witness to Him according to their theomorphic nature and their state of servitude before the Lord (*'ubudiyyah*), the state which is the *raison d'être* of human existence.

1. Islam is based on intelligence and intelligence is light as expressed in the hadith, inna'l–'aqla nurun (Verily intelligence is light). The characteristic expression of Islam is the courtyard of an Alhambra whose forms are so many crystallizations of

light and whose spaces are defined by the rays of that light which symbolizes, in this world, the Divine Intellect.
2. On tradition and modernism as used here and in fact in all of our writings see F. Schuon, Light on the Ancient Worlds, trans. Lord Northbourne, London, 1969; and R Guenon, The Crisis of the Modern World, trans. M. Pallis and R. Nicholson, London, 1962. If we are forced to re-define these terms here, it is because despite the considerable amount of writing devoted to the subject by the outstanding traditional writers such as Guenon, Schuon, A. K. Coomaraswamy, T. Burckhardt, M. Lings and others, there are still many readers, especially Muslim ones, for whom the distinction between tradition and modernism is not clear.

They still identify tradition with customs and modernism with all that is contemporary. Many Western students of Islam also identify "modern" with "advanced", "developed" and the like as if the march of time itself guarantees betterment. For example C. Leiden, a political scientist and student of contemporary Islam writes, "Equally important is how the term modernization can itself provide insight into these questions.

This is not the first time in history that societies have undergone confrontation with other 'advanced' societies and have learned to accommodate to them. Every such confrontation was, in a sense, a clash or contact with modernization." J. A. Bill and C. Leiden, Politics Middle East, p 63.

The author goes on to cite as example the confrontation of the Romans with the Greeks and the Arabs with the Byzantine and Persians. However, despite the decadent nature of late Greek culture, neither the Greeks nor certainly the theocratic Byzantines and Persians were modern in our definition of the word according to which this is the first time that traditional societies confront modernism

3. Despite the totally anti-traditional character of the perspective which dominates modern anthropology, even certain anthropologists have come to the conclusion that from a metaphysical and spiritual point of view, man has not evolved one iota since the Stone Age. If in the early decades of this century this view was championed by a few scholars such as A. Jeremias and W. Schmidt, in recent years it has received a more powerful support based on extensive evidence reflected in the studies of such men as J. Servier and from the point of view of religious anthropology, M. Eliade.
4. It must be remembered that even during this relatively short period of five centuries, the Muslim world has remained for the most part traditional and did not feel the full impact of modernism until a century ago. See S. H. Nasr, Islam and the Plight of Modern Man, London, 1976.
5. In the famous Persian verse "Invoke until thy invocation gives rise to meditation (fikr) And gives birth to a hundred thousand virgin "thoughts" (andishah)." In these verses the relation of mental activity in a traditional context to spiritual practice and contemplation is stated clearly.
6. There have been recent attempts to escape from the reductionism of classical physic and to introduce both life and even the psyche as independent elements in the Universe. But the general view of modern science remains the reductionist one which would reduce spirit to mind, mind to the external aspects of the psyche, the external aspects of the psyche to organic behaviour, and organisms to molecular structures.

The man who knows and who has the certitude of his own consciousness is thus reduced to chemical and physical elements which in reality are concepts of his own mind imposed upon the natural domain. See A. Koestler and J. R. Smythies (eds.), Beyond Reductionism, London, 1959., especially the article of V. E. Frankl, "Reductionism and Nihilism" where he writes, 'the present danger does not really lie in the loss of universality on the part of the scientist, but rather in his pretense and claim of totality .... the true nihilism of today is reductionism .... Contemporary nihilism no longer brandishes the word nothingness; today nihilism is camouflaged as nothing-but-ness.

Human phenomena are thus turned into mere epiphenomena." See also the remarkable work of E. F. Schumacher, A Guide for the Perplexed, New York, 1977, especially chapter one where this question is discussed.

7. See F. Brunner, Science et realité, Paris, 1956, where the author displays clearly the non-anthropomorphic nature of the traditional sciences based on their reliance upon the Divine Intellect rather than mere human reason.
8. Concerning the study of the cosmos as a crypt as far as Islam is concerned see S. H. Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic

Cosmological Doctrines, London, 1978, chapter 15.
9. See S. H. Nasr, "Self-awareness and Ultimate Selfhood," Religious Studies, vol 13, no. 3, Sept. 1977, pp. 319-325.
10. The classical study of E. Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience is still valuable in tracing this development in Western thought.
11. It was especially Sadr al-Din Shirazi who elucidated, perhaps more than any other Muslim philosopher, the relation between the three paths of reason, intuition and revelation open to man in his quest for the attainment of knowledge. See S. H. Nasr, Sadr al-Din Shirazi and his Transcendent Theosophy, London, 1978.
12. There are of course many men and women living in the modern world who would not accept this description of modern man as far as it concerns themselves. But such people, whose number in fact grows every day in the West, are really contemporary rather than modern. The characteristics which we have mentioned pertain to modernism as such and not to a particular contemporary individual who may in fact stand opposed to them. See G. Eaton, The King of the Castle, London, 1977.
13. On the Islamic conception of man see S. H. Nasr, "Who is Man, the Perennial Answer of Islam," in J. Needleman (ed.), The Sword of Gnosis, Baltimore, 1974, pp. 203-17.
14. Consciousness has no origin in time. No matter how we try to go back in the examination of our consciousness, we cannot obviously reach a temporal beginning. At the heart of this consciousness in fact resides the Infinite Consciousness of God who is at once the Absolutely Transcendent Reality and the Infinite Self residing at the center of our being.

In general, Sufism has emphasized more the objective and Hinduism the subjective pole of the One Reality which is at once pure Object and pure Subject, but the conception of the Divinity as pure Subject has also been always present in Islam as the reference in the Holy Quran to God as the Inward (al-batin), the prophetic hadith already cited and such classical Sufi treatises as the Conference of the Birds (Mantiq al-tayr) reveal. See F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, trans. D. M. Matheson, London, 1953, pp. 95ff.

15. It is of interest to note that one of the outstanding treatises of Islamic philosophy dealing with metaphysics and eschatology is a work by Sadr al-Din Shirazi entitled Mafatih al-ghayb, literally Keys to the Invisible World.
16. "In Islam, as we have seen, the Divine ray pierces directly through all degrees of existence, like an axis or central pivot, which links them harmoniously and bestows upon each degree what is suited to it; and we have also seen how the straight ray curves on its return and becomes a circle that brings everything back to its point of departure ..." L. Schaya, "Contemplation and Action in Judaism and Islam," in Y. Ibish and I. Marculescu (eds.), Contemplation and Action in World Religions, Seattle and London, 1978, p. 173.
17. Of course the ramification of this opposition and the details as they pertain to each field are such that they could be discussed indefinitely. But here we have the principles rather than their applications in mind. We have discussed some of these issues in detail in our Islam and the Plight of Modern Man
18. "... in the modern world more cases of loss of religious faith are to be traced to the theory of evolution as their immediate cause than to anything else .... for the more logically minded, there is no option but to choose between the two, that is, between the doctrine of the fall of man and the 'doctrine' of the rise of man, and to reject altogether the one not chosen ...." M. Lings, review of D. Dewar, The Transformist Illusion; in Studies in Comparative Religion, vol. 4, no. 1, 1970, p. 59.

One might also explain the rapid spread of the theory of evolution as a pseudo-religion in the West by saying that to some extent at last it came to fill a vacuum already created by a weakening of faith. But as far as Islam is concerned, its effect has been to corrode and weaken an already existing faith as it was for those Christians who still possessed strong religious faith when the theory of evolution spread in the late 19th century and in fact up to this day

19. See L. Bournoure, Determinisme et finalite, double loi de la vie, Paris, 1957; ibid., Recherche d'une doctrine de la vie. Vrai savants et faux prophetes, Paris, 1964; and D. Dewar, The Transformist Illusion, Newfreesboro (Tenn.), 1957. We have also dealt with this question in our Man and Nature, London, 1977.
20. Schumacher, Guide for the Perplexed, p. 114. "It is far better to believe that the earth is a disk supported by a tortoise and flanked by four elephants than to believe, in the name of 'evolutionism', in the coming of some 'superhuman' monster.

“A literal interpretation of cosmological symbols is, if not positively useful, at any rate harmless, whereas the scientific error such as evolutionism – is neither literally nor symbolically true; the repercussions of its falsity are beyond calculation.” F. Schuon, Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, p. 112.

21. “If we present, for the sake of argument, the theory of evolution is a most scientific formulation, we have to say something like this: 'At a certain moment of time the temperature of the Earth was such that it became most favourable for the aggregation of carbon atoms and oxygen with the nitrogen–hydrogen combination, and that from random occurrences of large clusters molecules occurred which were most favourably structured for the coming about of life, and from that point it went on through vast stretches of time, until through processes of natural selection a being finally occurred which is capable of choosing love over hate and justice over injustice, of writing poetry like that of Dante, composing music like that of Mozart, and making drawings like those of Leonardo.'

Of course, such a view of cosmogenesis is crazy. And I do not at all mean crazy in the sense of slangy invective but rather in the technical meaning of psychotic. Indeed such a view has much in common with certain aspects of schizophrenic thinking.” K. Stern, The Flight from Woman, New York, 1965, p. 290. The author is a well–known psychiatrist who has reached this conclusion not from traditional foundations but from the premises of various contemporary schools of thought.

22. See especially the works of Wilbur Smith.
23. We have discussed the idea of progress and its reputation in our Islam and the Plight of Modern Man. See also M. Jameelah, Islam and Modernism, Lahore, 1968. For an eloquent refutation of the notion of progress see M. Lings, Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions, 1967; also Lord Northbourne, Looking Back on Progress, London, 1968.
24. On the deeper roots of utopianism in the West see J. Servier, Histoire de L'utopie, Paris, 1967.
25. This is proven by the lack of such a term in classical Arabic or Persian.
26. We have dealt with the sacred quality of all aspects of Islamic learning even science in our Science and Civilization in Islam, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1968; also Islamic Science – An Illustrated Study, London, 1976.

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