

# ISLAM AT THE CROSSROADS

## CHAPTER 1

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### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This book was written nearly half a century ago -to be precise, in the autumn of 1933 -and was first published in Delhi in 1934, and subsequently in Lahore: a plea to the Muslims of my generation 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 civilization".

This first literary effort of mine on a purely Islamic subject found an immediate response among English-speaking Muslims of what was then an undivided India, and was reprinted in many editions. An Arabic translation followed a few years later, and its impact on the educated public in the Middle East was, if anything, even greater than that of the original, Englishlanguage version. The positive reception accorded to it soon gave rise to other books, by other Muslim writers, who took up the main theme of *Islam at the Crossroads* and elaborated it in various forms and on various levels, each according to his own bent of mind, sometimes coinciding with this or that of my views, but more often than not arriving at conclusions and postulates which appeared to me then -and appear to me now contrary to what I had envisaged. What I had in mind when I wrote this book was a re-awakening of the Muslims' consciousness of their being socially and culturally *different* from the all-powerful Western society, and thus a deepening of their pride in, and their desire to preserve, such of their own traditional forms and institutions as would help them to keep that essential "difference" alive and make them once again

culturally creative after the centuries of our community's utter stagnation and intellectual sterility. Throughout, the main accent was on "re-awakening" and "preserving": that is to say, preserving those forms and values of our past which were still relevant to the reality of Islam as a culture-producing force, and re-awakening the spirit of Islamic ideology as expressed in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah.

But, as it happened, much of what I had aimed at when writing *Islam at the Crossroads* was subsequently misunderstood by some of the Muslim readers and leaders who failed to grasp the full implications of my call to cultural creativeness, and began to think that what mattered was a mere return to the social forms evident in the past centuries of Muslim decadence. This, as I have already said, was quite contrary to what I had aimed at. To be sure, a re-awakening has taken and is taking place in the Muslim world: but, alas, it is not a re-awakening to the true values of the Qur'an and the 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.

It is in the endeavor to clarify something of the tragic confusion nowadays prevailing in the Muslim world that I am now presenting a new, revised edition of this book in the hope that it may be of benefit to the Muslim youth of *today*, just as the original 1934 edition was dedicated to the Muslim youth of those days -to the fathers or even the grandfathers of the present generation. If some of their forebears misunderstood my effort, perhaps the present-day young Muslims are better able to appreciate its meaning in the light of what has passed since it first appeared half a century ago. May it aid them on the difficult road that still lies ahead of them.  
*Tangier, 1982. MUHAMMAD ASAD*

## **FOREWORD**

Seldom has mankind been intellectually as restless as it is in our time. Not only are we faced with a multitude of problems requiring new and unprecedented solutions, but also the angle of vision in which these problems appear before us is different from anything to which we have been accustomed so far. In all countries society passes through fundamental changes. The pace at which this happens is everywhere different; but everywhere we can observe the same pressing energy which allows of no halt or hesitation.

The world of Islam is no exception in this respect. Here also we see old customs and ideas gradually disappear and new forms emerge. Where does this development lead? How deep does it reach? How far does it fit into the cultural mission of Islam?

This book does not pretend to give an exhaustive answer to all these questions. Owing to its limited scope only one of the problems facing the Muslims today, namely, the attitude which they should adopt towards Western civilization, has been selected for discussion. The vast implications of the subject, however, have made it necessary to extend our scrutiny over some basic aspects of Islam, more particularly with regard to the concept of the Sunnah. It is

impossible to give here more than the bare outline of a theme wide enough to fill many bulky volumes. But none the less -or, perhaps, therefore -I feel confident that this brief sketch will prove, for others, an incentive to further thought on this most important problem. 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 fundamentally different from the European; and from the very first there grew in me 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 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 reality, however, of present-day Muslim life appeared to be very far from the ideal possibilities given in the religious teachings of Islam. Whatever, in Islam, had been progress and movement had turned, among the Muslims, into indolence and stagnation; whatever there had been of generosity and readiness for self sacrifice had become, among the present-day Muslims, perverted into narrow-mindedness and love of an easy life.

Prompted by this discovery and puzzled by the obvious disparity between "Once and Now, I tried to approach the problem before me from a more intimate point of view: that is, I tried to imagine myself as being within the circle of Islam. It was a purely intellectual experiment; and it revealed to me, within a very short time, the right solution. I realized that the one and only reason for the social and cultural decay of the Muslims consisted in the fact-that they had gradually ceased to follow the teachings of Islam -in spirit. Islam was still there; but it was a body without a soul. The very element which once had created the strength of the Muslim world was now responsible for its weakness: Islamic society had been built, from the very outset, on religious foundations alone, and the weakening of those foundations has necessarily weakened the cultural structure and possibly might cause its ultimate disappearance.

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 autumn of 1925, in the mountains of Afghanistan -a young provincial governor said to me: "But you *are* a Muslim, only you don't

know it yourself." I Was struck by these words and remained silent. But when I returned to Europe once again in 1926, I realized that the only logical consequence of my attitude was to embrace Islam.

So much about the *circumstances* of my becoming a Muslim. Since then I have been asked, time and 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 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.

Ever since I endeavored to learn as much as I could about Islam. I studied the Our'an and the Traditions of the Prophet. I studied the language of Islam and its history, and a good deal of what had been written about it and against it. I spent nearly six years in the Hijaz and Najd, mostly in Mecca and Medina, so that I might experience something of the original surroundings

in which this religion was preached by the Arabian Prophet. As the Hijaz is the meeting ground of Muslims from many countries, I was able to compare most of the different religious and social views prevalent in the Islamic world in our days. Those studies and comparisons created in me 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; and all my interest became, since then, centered around the problem of its regeneration.

This little book is a humble contribution towards that great goal. It does not pretend to be a dispassionate survey of affairs; it is the statement of a case, as I see it: the case of Islam *versus* Western civilization. And it is not written for those to whom Islam is only one of the many, more or less useful, accessories to social life, but rather for those in whose hearts still lives a spark of the flame which burned in the hearts of the Companions of the Prophet -the flame that once made Islam so great as a social order and a cultural achievement.

*Delhi*, March 1934. M.A.

## **THE OPEN ROAD OF ISLAM**

One of the slogans most characteristic of the present age is "the conquest of space". Means of communication have been developed which are far beyond the dreams of former generations; and these new means have set in motion a far more rapid and extensive transfer of goods than ever before within the history of mankind. The result of this development is an economic interdependence of nations. No single nation or group can today afford to remain aloof from the rest of the world. Economic development has ceased to be local. Its character has become world-wide. It ignores, at least in its tendency, political boundaries and geographical distances. It carries with itself -and possibly this is even more important than the purely material side of the problem -the ever-increasing necessity of a transfer not only of merchandise but also of thoughts and cultural values. But whereas those two forces, the economic and the cultural, often go hand in hand, there is a difference in their dynamic rules. The elementary laws of economics require that the exchange of goods between nations be *mutual*; this means that no nation can act as a buyer only while another nation is always a seller; in the long run, each of them must play both parts simultaneously, giving to, and taking from, each other, be it directly or through the medium of other actors in the play of economic forces. But in the cultural field this iron rule of exchange is not a necessity, at least not always a visible one: that is to say, the transfer of ideas and cultural influences is not necessarily based on the principle of give-and-take. It lies in human nature that nations and civilizations which are politically and economically more virile exert a strong fascination on the weaker or less active communities, and influence them in the intellectual and social spheres without being influenced themselves. Such is the situation today with regard to the relations between the Western and the Muslim worlds. From the viewpoint of the historical observer, the strong, one-sided influence which Western civilization exerts on the Muslim world -whether admitted or not admitted by the Muslims themselves -is not at all surprising, because it is the outcome of a long historic process for which there are several analogies elsewhere. But whereas the historian, being concerned with observation only, may be satisfied, for us Muslims the problem remains unsettled. For us who are not mere interested spectators, but very real actors in this drama -for us who regard ourselves as the followers of the Prophet Muhammad -the problem really *begins* here. We believe that Islam, unlike other religions, is not only a spiritual attitude of mind, adjustable to different cultural settings, but a self-sufficing orbit of culture and a social system of clearly defined features. When, as is the case today, a foreign civilization extends its radiations into our midst and causes certain changes in our own cultural organism, we are bound to make it clear to ourselves whether that foreign influence runs in the direction of our own cultural possibilities or against them; whether it acts as an invigorating serum in the body of Islamic culture, or as a poison.

An answer to this question can be found through analysis only. We have to discover the motive forces of both civilizations -the Islamic and that of the modern West -and then to investigate how far a cooperation is possible between them. And as the Islamic civilization is essentially a religious one, we must, first of all, try to define the general role of religion in human life. What we call the "religious attitude" is a natural outcome of man's intellectual and biological constitution. Man is unable to explain to himself the mystery of life, the mystery of birth and death, the mystery of infinity and eternity. His reasoning stops before impregnable walls. He

can , therefore, do two things only. The one is to give up all attempts at understanding life as a *totality*. In this case, he will rely upon the evidence of external experiences alone and will limit his conclusions to their sphere. Thus he will be able to understand single fragments of life, which may increase in number and clarity as rapidly or as slowly as human knowledge of Nature increases, but will, none the less, always remain only fragments -the grasp of the totality itself remaining beyond the methodological equipment of human reason. This is the way the natural sciences go. The other possibility -which may well exist side by side with the scientific one -is the way of religion. It leads man, by means of an inner, mostly intuitive experience, to the acceptance of unitary explanation of life on the assumption that there exists a supreme Creative Power which governs the universe according to some preconceived plan above and beyond human understanding. As has just been said, this conception does not necessarily preclude man from an investigation of such facts and fragments of life as offer themselves for external observation; there is no *inherent* antagonism between the external (scientific) and internal (religious) perceptions. But the latter is, in fact, the only speculative possibility of conceiving all life as a unity of essence and motive-power; in short, as a well-balanced, harmonious totality. The term "harmonious", though so terribly misused, is very important in this connection, because it implies a corresponding attitude in man himself. The religious human being knows that whatever happens to him and within him can never be the result of a blind play of forces without consciousness and purpose; he believes it to be the outcome of God's conscious will alone, and, therefore, organically integrated within a universal plan. In this way man is enabled to solve the bitter antagonism between the human Self and the objective world of facts and appearances which is called Nature. The human being, with all the intricate mechanism of his soul, with all his desires and fears, his feelings, and his speculative uncertainties, sees himself faced by a Nature in which bounty and cruelty, danger and security are mixed in a wondrous, inexplicable way and apparently work on lines' Entirely different from the methods and the structure of the human mind. Never has purely intellectual philosophy or experimental science been able to resolve this conflict. This exactly is the point where religion steps in.

In the light of religious perception and experience, the human , self-conscious Self and a mute , seemingly irresponsible Nature are brought into a relation of spiritual harmony because both, the individual consciousness of man and the Nature that surrounds him and is within him, are nothing but coordinate, if different, manifestations of one and the same Creative Will. The immense benefit which religion thus confers upon man is the realization that he is, and never can cease to be , a well-planned unit in the eternal movement of Creation: a definite part of the infinite organism of universal destiny. The psychological consequence of this conception is a deep feeling of spiritual security -that balance between hopes and fears which distinguishes the positively religious man -whatever his religion -from the irreligious.

This fundamental position is common to all great religions , whatever may be their specific doctrines ; and equally common to all of them is the moral appeal to man to surrender himself to the manifest Will of God. But Islam , and Islam alone , goes beyond this theoretical explanation and exhortation. 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 by which everyone 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 in 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, 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 coexistence and -actual-inseparability is *insisted* upon as the natural basis of life.

This, I believe, is the reason for the peculiar form of the Islamic prayer, in which spiritual concentration and certain bodily movements are coordinated with each other. Inimical critics of Islam often select this way of praying as a proof of their allegation that Islam is a religion of formalism and outwardness. And, in fact, people of other religions, who are accustomed neatly to separate the "spiritual" from the "bodily" almost in the same way as the dairyman separates the cream from the milk , cannot easily understand that in the un skimmed milk of Islam both these ingredients, though distinct in their respective constitutions, harmoniously live and express themselves together. In other words, the Islamic prayer consists of mental concentration *and* bodily movements because human life itself is of such a composition, and because we are supposed to approach God through the sum-total of *all* the faculties which He has, bestowed upon us.

, A further illustration of this attitude can be seen in the institution of the *tawaf*, the ceremony of circumambulating the Ka'bah in Mecca. As it is an indispensable obligation for everyone who enters the Holy City to go seven times around the Ka'bah , and as the observance of this injunction is one of the three most essential points of the Meccan pilgrimage, we have the right to ask ourselves: What is the meaning of this? Is it necessary to express devotion in such a formalistic way?

The answer is quite obvious. If we move in a circle around any object we thereby establish that object as the central point of our action. The Ka'bah, towards which every Muslim turns his face in prayer, symbolizes the Oneness of God. The bodily movement of the pilgrim in the *tawaf* symbolizes the activity of human life. Consequently, the *tawaf* implies that not only our devotional thoughts but also our practical life, our actions and endeavors must have the idea of God and His Oneness for their center -in accordance with the words of the Holy Qur'an:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

"I have not created the invisible beings and mankind to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me" *tsiirah. 51:56*).

Thus, the conception of "worship" in Islam is different from that in any other religion. Here it is not restricted to the purely devotional practices, for example prayers or fasting, but extends

over the whole or man's practical life as well: If the object of our life as a whole is to be the worship of God, we must necessarily regard this life, in the totality of all its aspects, as one complex moral responsibility. Thus, all our actions, even the seemingly trivial ones, must be performed as acts of worship; that is, performed *consciously* as constituting a part of God's universal plan. Such a state of things is for the man of average capability a distant ideal ; but is it .not the purpose of religion to bring ideals 'into real existence?

The position of Islam in this respect is unmistakable. It teaches us, firstly, that the permanent worship of God in all the manifold actions of human life is the very meaning of this life; and, secondly, that the achievement of this purpose remains impossible so long as we divide our lives into two parts, the spiritual and the material: they must be bound together, in our consciousness and in our actions, into one harmonious entity. Our notion of God's Oneness must be reflected in our own striving towards a coordination and unification of the various aspects of our life.

A logical consequence of this attitude is a further difference between Islam and all other religious systems known to me. It is to be found in the fact that Islam, as a teaching, undertakes to define not only the metaphysical relations between man and his Creator, but also -and with scarcely less insistence -the earthly relations between the individual and his social surroundings. The earthly life is not regarded as a mere empty shell, a meaningless shadow of the Hereafter that is to come, but as a self-contained, positive entity. God Himself is a Unity not only in essence but also in purpose; and, therefore, His creation is a unity, possibly in essence but certainly in purpose.

God-consciousness -in the wider sense just explained -constitutes, according to Islam , the meaning of human life. And it is this conception alone that shows us the possibility of man's reaching perfection in his individual, earthly life. Of all religious systems, Islam alone declares that individual perfection is-possible-in our earthly existence. Islam does not postpone this fulfillment until after a suppression of the so-called "bodily" desires, as the Christian teaching does; nor does it promise a continuous chain of rebirths on progressively higher planes, as is the case with Hinduism; nor does it agree with Buddhism, according to which perfection and salvation can only be obtained through an annihilation of the individual Self and its emotional links with the world . No -: Islam is emphatic in the assertion that man can reach perfection in his earthly, individual life by making full use of all his natural endowments and worldly possibilities.

To avoid a misunderstanding, the term "perfection" will have to be defined in the sense in which it is used here. With regard to human, biologically-limited beings, we cannot possibly consider the idea of "absolute" perfection, because the Absolute belongs to the realm of Divine attributes alone. Human perfection, in its true psychological and moral sense , must of necessity have a relative and strictly limited connotation. It does not imply the possession of *all* imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of new qualities from outside, but solely *the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual in such a way as to rouse his innate but otherwise dormant powers*. Owing to the natural variety of life



Phenomena, the inborn qualities of man differ in each individual case. It would be absurd, therefore, to suppose that all human beings should, or even could, strive towards one and the same "type" of perfection -just as it would be absurd to expect a perfect' racehorse and a perfect heavy-draught horse to possess exactly the same qualities. Both may be individually perfect and satisfactory, but they will be *different*, because their original characters are different. With human beings the case is similar. If perfection were to be standardized to a specific "type" -as Christianity does in the type of the ascetic saint -human beings would have to give up, or change, or suppress, all their individual differentiations. But this would clearly violate the Divine law of individual variety which dominates all life on this earth. Therefore Islam, which is not a religion of repression, allows to man a very wide margin in his personal and social existence, so that the various qualities, temperaments and psychological inclinations of different individuals might find their own ways to positive development according to their individual predispositions. Thus, a man may be an ascetic, or he may enjoy the full measure of his sensual possibilities within the lawful limits; he may be a nomad roaming through the deserts, without food for tomorrow, or a rich merchant surrounded by his goods: so long as he sincerely and consciously submits to the laws decreed by God, he is free to shape his personal life to whatever form his nature directs him. His duty is to Olake the best of himself so that he might honor the life-gift which his Creator has bestowed upon him; and to help his fellow-beings, by means of his own development, in their spiritual, social and material endeavors'. But the *form* of his individual life is in no way fixed by a single standard. He is free to make his choice from among all the limitless lawful possibilities open to him. The basis of this "liberalism" in Islam is to be found in the conception that man's original nature is essentially good. Contrary to the Christian idea that man is born sinful, or the teachings of Hinduism that he is originally low and impure and must painfully stagger through a long chain of transmigrations towards the ultimate goal of perfection, the Islamic teaching contends that man is born pure and -in the sense explained above potentially perfect. It is said in the Holy Qur'an:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ  
ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ

"Verily, We create man in the best conformation" but in the same breath the Qur'an continues: " . . . and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low -excepting only such as attain to faith and do good works" (*sarah 95:4-6*).

In these verses is expressed the doctrine that man is originally good and pure; and, furthermore, that disbelief in God and lack of good actions may destroy his original perfection.

On the other hand, man may retain, or regain, that original, individual perfection if he consciously realizes God's Oneness and submits to His laws. Thus, according to 'Islam evil is never essential or even original; it is an acquisition of man's conscious life, and is due to a misuse of the innate, positive qualities with which God endows every human being. Those qualities are, as has been said before, different in every individual, but always potentially perfect in themselves; and their full development is possible within the period of man's individual life on earth. We take it for granted that the life *after* death, owing to its entirely changed conditions of feeling and perception, will confer upon us other, quite new qualities

and faculties which will make a still further progress of the human soul possible; but this concerns our future life alone. In this earthly life, too, the Islamic teaching definitely asserts, we -everyone of us -can reach a full measure of perfection by developing the positive, already existing traits of which our personalities are composed.

Of all religions, Islam alone makes it possible for man to enjoy the full range of his earthly life without necessarily losing his spiritual orientation. How entirely different is this from the Christian conception! According to the Christian dogma, mankind stumbles under a hereditary sin committed by Adam and Eve, and consequently the whole of human life is looked upon -in dogmatic theory at least -as a gloomy vale of sorrows. It is the battlefield of two opposing forces: the Evil, represented by Satan, and the Good, represented by Jesus Christ. By means of bodily temptations, Satan tries to bar the progress of the human soul towards the light eternal; and whereas the soul belongs to Christ, the body is the playground of satanic influences. One could express it differently: the world of Matter is essentially satanic, whereas the world of the Spirit is divine and good. Everything in human nature that is material, or "carnal", as Christian theology prefers to call it, is a direct result of Adam's succumbing to the advice of the hellish Prince of Darkness and Matter. Therefore to obtain salvation man must turn his heart away from this world of the flesh towards the future spiritual world where the sin of mankind is redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Even if this dogma is not -and never was -obeyed in practice, the very existence of such a teaching tends to produce a permanent feeling of bad conscience in the religiously inclined man. He is tossed about between the peremptory call to neglect the world and the natural urge of his heart to live and to enjoy this life. The very idea of an unavoidable, because inherited, sin, and of its mystical -to the average intellect incomprehensible -redemption through the suffering of Jesus on the cross, erects a barrier between man's spiritual longing and his legitimate, worldly desires.

In Islam we know nothing of an "original sin"; we regard such a concept as contrary to the idea of God's justice. God does not make a child responsible for the doings of his parents: how, then, could He have made all those numberless generations of mankind responsible for a sin of disobedience committed by their remote ancestors? It is no doubt possible to construct philosophical explanations of this strange assumption, but for the unsophisticated intellect it will always remain as artificial and as unsatisfactory as the concept of the Trinity itself. And as there is no hereditary sin, there is also no universal redemption of mankind in the teachings of Islam. Redemption and damnation are *individual*. Every Muslim is his own redeemer; he beats all possibilities of spiritual success and failure 'within his own heart. It is said of man in the Qur'an:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِن نَّسِينَا أَوْ  
أَخْطَاْنَا ۗ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا ۗ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا  
بِهِ ۗ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا ۗ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

"In his favour shall be whatever good he does, and against him whatever evil he does" (sarah 2:286).

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

Another verse says: "Nought shall be accounted unto man but what he is striving for" (sarah 53:39).

But if Islam does not share the gloomy view of life as expressed in Pauline Christianity, it teaches us, none the less, not to attribute to earthly life that exaggerated value which modern Western civilization attributes to it. While the Christian outlook implies that earthly life is a bad business, the modern West as distinct from Christianity -adores life in exactly the same way as the glutton adores his food: he devours it, but has no respect for it. Islam, on the other hand looks upon earthly life with calm and respect. It does not worship it but regards it as an organic stage on our way to a higher existence. But just *because* it is a stage, and a necessary stage, too, man has no right to despise or even to underrate the value of his earthly life. Our travel through this world is a necessary, positive part in God's plan. Human life, therefore, is of tremendous value; but we must never forget that it is purely instrumental value in Islam there is no room for materialistic optimism of the modern West which says: "My kingdom is of this world alone" -nor for the life contempt of the Christian saying: my kingdom is not, of this world:'. Islam goes the middle way. The Qur'an teaches us to pray:

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

"O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come!" (sarah 2:201)

Thus the full appreciation of this world its good is in no way a handicap for our spiritual endeavors. Material prosperity is desirable, though not a goal in itself. The goal of all our practical activities ought always to be the creation and maintenance of such personal and social conditions as might be conducive to the development of moral stamina in human beings. In accordance with this principle, Islam leads man towards a consciousness of moral responsibility in all that he does, whether great or small. The well-known injunction of the Gospels, "Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and render unto God that which belongs to God" has no place in the theological structure of Islam, because Islam does not admit of the existence of conflict between the moral and socio-economic requirements of our life. In everything there can be only one choice: the choice between Right and Wrong --and nothing in-between. Hence the intense insistence on *action*. as an indispensable element of morality.

Every individual Muslim has to regard himself as to some extent personally responsible for all happenings around him, and to strive for the establishment of Right and the abolition of Wrong at every time and in every direction'. A sanction for this attitude is to be found in the Qur'anic verse:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۚ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۚ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

"You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong" (sarah 3:110).

This is the moral justification of the aggressive activism of Islam, a justification of the early Islamic conquests and of its so-called "imperialism". For the world of imperialist if one insists on using this term; but this comforts at other people's cost; nor has it ever meant the coercion of nonbelievers into the fold of Islam. It has only meant, as it means today, the construction of a worldly framework for the best possible spiritual development of man. For, according to the teachings of Islam, moral knowledge automatically forces moral responsibility upon man. A mere Platonic discernment between Right and Wrong, without the urge to promote Right and to destroy Wrong, is a gross immorality in itself, for morality lives and dies with the human endeavor to establish its victory upon earth.