

Religious Diversity and Islam in America

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Abstract: Diversity is the essence and spirit of America or the West both as a place and a people. Islam also allows for diversity within its concept of unity and oneness of God. Muslims, therefore, have no problem co-existing in peace with the Jews, Christians and the followers of other religions. Problems arise (a) when secular values or principles disturb the working balance of the otherwise mutually exclusive religious diversity and harmony in America; (b) when one follows opportunist policies, practices double standards, and is moved by mere worldly or political interests; and (c) when war against the Zionist-and-neo-conservative-manufactured terrorism turns into war against Islam. Such misleading and mischievous tendencies or policies prevent peace from prevailing, which ultimately tarnish the image of religions in the eyes of their followers and those of the rest making a mockery of the idea of religious diversity even in the so-called most democratic country called the United States of America!

Religious diversity and Islam in America is an interesting subject connecting the East and the West and could be approached from as many diverse perspectives as the vast and variegated land of America itself. Diversity is the essence and spirit of America whose beauty and variety made Walt Whitman describe it as “the varied and ample land” of “long panoramas of visions” and declare that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”¹ Whitman took the idea from his older American contemporary, the poet-philosopher Emerson, who, towards the end of his essay “The Poet,” had thought of the American landscape as “a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination,” suggesting its wonderful

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possibilities. Both were influenced by Oriental religions and cultures, including Arabic and Islam. While Whitman as a poet of American democracy and democratic freedom hoped for a “universal” religion consisting of aspects of all faiths, Emerson’s considerable knowledge of Islamic and oriental literatures did not make him compromise with his Western heritage since he believed in the superiority of the West. However, Emerson is on record to have had a liking for the Persian Sufi poets from whom he frequently chose to quote. In 1822 he made the following journal entry noting the link of religion among the peoples of the East and the West:

The only bond of connection which can traverse the long duration, which separates the ends of the worlds and unites the first peoples to the knowledge and sympathy of the last people, is religion.²

Herman Melville, Washington Irving, Longfellow, and John Whittier are among the other major American writers whose use of Arab and Islamic elements is quite significant. The wide connections between American and European writers and the Muslim East during the 18th and 19th centuries merited a great deal of graduate studies and doctoral research in many universities in the West during the second half of the twentieth century.

This brief literary background suggests that Islam as a religion and culture has been a presence on the literary and intellectual horizon of America since the early nineteenth century, let alone its traces, which go even further back. But the early image of Islam and Muslim East in America has largely been based on indirect encounter through fragmentary printed sources and exotic experiences of travellers and missionaries with their preconceived notions of Islam and its followers in the East. The early Muslims to arrive in America were a small number of slaves who were actually kidnapped African Muslims: “By the eighteenth century there were many thousands of them, working as slaves on plantations. These early communities cut off from their heritage and families, inevitably lost their Islamic identity as time went by.”³ Although the number of Muslims was growing during the nineteenth century and a few of them left some fragmentary manuscripts and documentary records of limited scope depicting their experiences and sufferings, the early

American image of Islam and Islamic orient was largely formed out of lack of knowledge, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the holy Islamic texts and the conduct and behaviour of Muslims, who after all did not figure prominently in American society until the recent past.

In the twentieth century American reception of Islamic thought and culture has been more and more direct and positive due to large-scale migration and wide contacts between America and the Muslim world at large through various means—diplomatic, academic, professional, trade, tour, and labour. As a result, over the last four or five decades, Islam has become the fastest growing religion in America where currently Muslims are the second largest religious group numbering about six millions and making a difference by actively taking part in various socio-political and cultural activities and contributing vigorously to its economy.

Looking at the picture from a larger perspective, the history of the world is as much a history of civilizational clashes as it is of civilizational dialogues. However, the civilizational dialogues have become the rule rather than the exception in the evolution of a global culture in the modern era. Human discourse in all the fields of knowledge and endeavour, whether popular or political or intellectual or religious, is complex and universal and, as such, cuts across all barriers—geographical, cultural, linguistic or otherwise. The power of human interaction through all available means—art, literature, science and technology—is such that it continues to contribute to the steady dissemination of cultural and religious traditions without diminishing their independent identities. Although under the process of increasing globalisation, the dominant or elite cultures and traditions tend to displace the weaker ones of the economically-disadvantaged communities or the ethnic and religious minorities, the interactions between them cannot be reduced to relations along the territorial borders or business contracts or government-to-government agreements, especially when the world is involved in a discourse on democratic equality, racial and ethnic diversity, tolerance, acceptance, accommodation, and inclusiveness. The politically powerful discourse of human rights on the issues of the basic freedoms of mankind—political, religious and racial—especially in this period of post colonialism and postmodernism,

has made the investigation of epistemological issues concerning the sources of knowledge and the hermeneutics of interpreting civilizational encounters including the partnerships of the New World Order even more necessary, urgent and illuminating.

With the advent of Islam in the 7th century C.E., followed by the establishment of Islamic or Muslim kingdoms or empires around the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and through a series of historical crusades, contacts between Islam and the West were established. Like many other civilizations, Islamic civilization also saw its rise and fall and is now witnessing its resurgence. Whatever the argument may be concerning the cultural invasion and political domination of the East by the West, the fact is, both have influenced and learnt from each other throughout the centuries. The international and cross-cultural dimensions of both have been expanding since the time of the earliest contacts between the two. The debate over the marginalization and displacement of the Islamic world-view and its moral and spiritual values by Western secular forces is no longer tenable, with Samuel Huntington's theory of clash of civilizations (clash of interests?) and what he calls "the Age of Muslim Wars" suggesting that Islam and Islamic resurgence in modern times constitute a challenging force to America and American domination of the world and if not contained in a timely manner would tip the balance of the scale.⁴ Francis Fukuyama, as if critiquing or retracting his own theory of the end of history, goes even further in positing Muslims, especially the radical Muslims, as today's new fascists about to overthrow either somewhat liberal and secular or highly tyrannical but pro-American governments in Muslim countries.⁵ One could logically ask: is it not the opposite by being the age of new crusades against Muslims? Are not the born-again neo-conservative Christian and Zionist fanatics the real new fascist-Bolsheviks, who are out there to suppress democratic dissent and take away democratic freedom of Muslims in the name of cracking down on what has been terribly popularized as "terrorism"?

Understanding Islam vs America

Regardless of contentious issues hinted above, the dynamics of linguistic transfusion and interchanges helped to make the most, if not the best, of the meetings, quiet or confrontational, between Islam

as a religion and a civilization, on the one hand, and whatever is American, on the other. Neither of them remained confined to the place of its origin, having reached far and wide across the languages and cultures of the world. Both are, therefore, equally global and pluralistic. Islam does not mean whatever is Arab or Middle-Eastern only, and “American” or “Western” cannot be geographically confined to the white-inhabited lands only. There are Muslims all over the world just as there are Western influences infiltrating its every nook and corner.

If America means “we the people” democracy, quality, punctuality, hard work, affluence, efficiency, professionalism, transparency, accountability, technology, corporate businesses, multinational companies, and worldliness and secularism—it is going unstoppably global and worldwide. If Islam means the last revealed monotheistic religion and thereby Godliness, accountability to God, His law as the supreme law on the Earth, belief in the hereafter, divine unity and God-enjoined inviolable principles of justice and equality with the attendant values of spirituality and spiritual unity both inwards and outwards, it is going equally global and worldwide. Both Islam and America have each a message to catch on, which has in fact already caught on—and these respective messages have done so deeply and irreversibly.

But it is too simplistic to identify the messages of America and Islam with some of their defining characteristics only. Neither of them has to be reductively and redundantly synonymous with its core values and concepts nor have they the sole monopoly over the set of associations as suggested above. Both are actually meant to be much more than what they respectively imply as their major focus. Both of them have a lot in common including many good aspects of each other. America is not without an element of religious soul searching and spiritual reflection kept alive and being practiced by the religious or religiously-inclined people of all faiths. Islam also is not without its share of material worldliness. In fact, it does very well take into account the importance of worldly life and its riches and resources and necessities, with certain limits and obligations, however, to make it imperative that the material world and its opportunities be used as a means of remembering, discovering and understanding God and to subject oneself to God. Today, high

quality products and costly artefacts and rare archaeological treasures are being found in every part of the world just as no part of the world is without some kind of violence, unrest, insecurity, exploitation, discrimination and, in some cases, gross violation of what is popularly known as human rights. In this respect we must not forget Muslim captives in Guantanamo Bay, Palestinians imprisoned in their own homeland and being killed every day for years by the American-administration backed and financed state of Israel, people of Indian-occupied Kashmir, Chechens (Nukhchis), Tibetans, Arakanese (or Rohingyas) Muslims squeezed to live a life in death under the Myanmar military *junta* and the Muslim Mindanao in the southern Phillippines dying for its rights. Above all, we must not forget the dictatorial regimes in the Arab and Muslim world, which not only suppress their own people but also senselessly discriminate against their fellow Muslims on the basis of race, colour and the country of origin.

Islam and Muslims in America

Nevertheless, in view of the pervasive multiplicity of American society, it must be interesting to talk about religious diversity and Islam in a pluralistic society like America. Although Muslims believe that Islam is not just one of the faiths but in fact the last (and the best) faith directly revealed and ordained by God, asserting the indivisible oneness and unity of God at its centre, eternally universal in its message, Islam has already made its mark and acquired its place in the mosaic of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural background of the free and open America.

As the second largest religious community in America, Muslims are already an active and steadily expanding community to be reckoned with. Despite various problems, they have been making significant contributions in economics, politics and education. They have been participating in community building and the setting up of schools and organizations to make their constituencies politically aware and take part in the political process. As they have been trying to assimilate into American legal, ethical and educational systems, they have also been trying to maintain their ethnic and cultural values as they come from different backgrounds and countries.⁶ What binds them together, however, is their common identity of Islam as a way

of life and America as their permanent home. Depending on circumstances, they may have some differences and disagreements along ethnic and nationalistic divides but they rise above those differences in matters pertaining to the essentials of their religious faith.

The process of fostering common ground and common identity has been institutionalized by many Muslim organizations and associations and Islamic Centres and mosques around America. Various Islamic rituals and festivals like fasting during the month of *ramadān*, celebrations and sacrifices during the *haj* and, above all, daily congregational prayers, including Fridays, always facing in the direction of the same and only *qiblah* in Makkah, are giving Muslims the most common and vital identity, which goes deeper than anything else. As part of Islam as a complete way of life, Muslims have been involved in attempts to make *halāl* food, Islamic financing, and Islamic books and materials available to themselves, their families and children. The cultivation of literary expression by immigrant Muslim communities in predominantly non-Muslim countries like America, Canada, the UK, and Australia has already led to the growth of a Muslim literary tradition.⁷ In this way, the American Muslim community has transformed America just as America has transformed them for the better in terms of academic, professional, and technological skills and expertise.⁸ This of course has been made possible by the freedom and equality exercised in America and above all by the will of God.

It is true that the essential articles of faith of Islam are above and beyond dispute or compromise. While Islam may have differences with other religions in matters of certain “truths,” “morals” and “values,” it does accept the reality of their existence and believes in peaceful co-existence. As such it does not deny diversity just as it allows for variety within its own discourse. As Abdelwahab El-Messiri puts it:

The Islamic discourse is not monolithic, or uni-dimensional. Islam is undoubtedly the faith of monotheism. But monotheism does not mean monism; it means that the One God transcends both man and nature, and is above them. It means that except for the One and Only, God, everything else exists in a variety.

The Islamic discourse is not God's words, but the endeavour of the Muslims themselves within the given time and space, and exists therefore in numerous and diverse forms. The history of the Muslims is, thus, an expression of this numerousness and diversity.⁹

The "numerousness and diversity" express themselves in many ways: saintly contemplation, layman's uncritical practices, popular uprisings, political dialogues and intellectual discourses.

For Islam, whose fundamentals must remain the same, it is diversity in unity; for America, where everything is fair game, it is unity in diversity. For Islam, Ummatic unity under the concept of divine oneness comes first; for the West, diversity comes first. In Islamic world-view, God is at the centre and at the top, to be looked up to by all for hope, mercy, salvation and redemption; in Western secular world-view, man is at the centre, who looks at himself resulting in the infinite variety of anarchy, anthropomorphism, secularism, and moral crisis. As such, the notion of individual freedom and the process of individualization are at the core of Western philosophy, with endless but hopeless scope of possibilities ultimately defined by and settling in the quagmire of modern existentialist or absurd human condition.

In Islam, which actually means the surrender of the self to God, things are not allowed to descend and degenerate into what may be argued as the so-called self-creation or self-expression beyond the bounds of Islamically-sanctioned decency and propriety. This means that there is a fundamental difference between Islam and Western outlook, which caused a series of ignoble and miserable misunderstandings between the two in the past—misunderstandings which need not be mentioned or enumerated here in the short space of this article.

The Issue of Human Rights

Nevertheless, the case of human rights may be cited here as an example. Both the Islamic and the American idea of human rights have a lot in common—justice, equality, freedom, campaign against injustice and exploitation, and so on. Since these are among the

God-willed basic Islamic values and principles in a God-centered world, Muslims call, describe and characterize them as Islamic values, whereas the man-centered world describes them as human rights. Since Islam is not just a faith but a complete way of life covering all its aspects—social, political and spiritual—it believes in a discriminating use of freedom. For example, nudity and pornography can never ever be a freedom of expression in Islam. On the contrary, Americans think these are part of the freedom of expression and the main staple of their entertainment diet, so much so that these have become part and parcel of their everyday life. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve become painfully ashamed and hasten to cover their uncovered body with whatever they could—even with fig leaves. Unfortunately, their present-day American/Western children have descended in to do what is exactly the opposite—uncovering the body in an act of open sexuality.

Homosexuality and lesbianism have absolutely no place in Islam. But, to the utter shock and disdain of Muslims, Americans, in the name of freedom, have not only allowed such forbidden and despicable sexual activities to go on but also have euphemistically elevated them to the status of “gay rights,” “same sex partnership,” “same sex union” or “same sex marriage.” They have been turned blind and deaf to the civilized virtues of human society to the point of having elected openly homosexuals as their priests. All these have led to the worst of evils: paedophilia and the loss of the most cherished of things: childhood innocence.

In American culture, children are without the beauty of their most precious childhood innocence, which is irredeemably taken away from them under the false pretext that they grow up with the adult knowledge of human sexuality and sexual acts coupled with that of gun violence, drug addiction and the widespread “porn” culture. The extremist liberal rationale of giving the children now the knowledge which they will need later (which they will naturally know, develop and acquire anyway) and preparing them for the future is to force the bud to fully flower today rather than tomorrow, thereby to actually deflower it, or to kill the chicken today, out of greed, to have all the eggs at once. That's how liberal forces produce incomplete humans devoid of the beauty of childhood innocence and that is the most destructive of all destructive forces.

In Islam, a parent has the right and is responsible to morally guide and mould his/her child according to Islamic faith; if necessary the parent should/can even go an extra mile to exert what is his/her parental authority to influence the child to conform to the Islamic code as best as possible. Unfortunately, America misunderstands this parental obligation as child abuse with illegal pressure and restraint.

The question is: how much authority is too much authority? When does parental authority become parental abuse? While it cannot be denied that there may be parents in all societies including Christian and Jewish who are abusive to their children, America should draw a careful line between what is abuse and what is the Muslim parents' right and duty in upbringing their children in an Islamic way. What is abuse in the eyes of American secular law may not be so in Islamic culture. If a teenage child's calling 9/11 plunges the parents under police custody, we think it is tantamount to giving indiscriminate license or uninformed or irresponsible freedom to the child at the expense of the parents' sacred moral right within the limits of the Islamic concept of the role of the parents. No one loves and cares for a child more than the child's parents do, whose rightful and selfless efforts to give Islamic training to their child should be taken into account before the child's misguided freedom is allowed to land the parents in trouble or a humiliating situation. Children should not be encouraged to be disrespectful and disobedient to their parents. Respect for parents and (other elders as well) has been deeply emphasized in Islam. This is just one example of disagreement between Islam and American culture.

Muslims in America have a great role to play in propagating the cause of Islam and preserving Islamic tradition and heritage. They should take advantage of what is the greatest strength of America—its freedom and openness, and diversity—with an open mind, without cynically manipulating that opportunity. As they are proud of being Americans, they should also be proud of being Muslims. In fact, in matters of basic covenants of Islamic faith, they should be proud of their Muslim identity without undermining their status as being Americans in any way. Their loyalty to God and their loyalty to America must not be allowed to clash and polarize but be rationally addressed in a complementary way. Even for those who might

sentimentally and superficially create a hierarchy and let one loyalty supersede the other, no hierarchy of loyalties should undermine an American Muslim's loyalty to America. The fact of the matter is that if one is loyal to God, one cannot be disloyal to the land of one's choice and one's home where one lives and makes a living. One's obligations and commitments to the land where one lives and feels protected by its laws and enjoys the best of freedoms available on the face of the earth become deeper and more intense indeed if one is committed to upholding one's commitments to God. That is the teaching of Islam.

Muslims believe in the fact that the Islamic revealed sources and truths are the foundation of true knowledge and universalism. They believe in the fundamental Islamic principle that, from top to bottom, from the king to the commoner, all are equal in the eyes of God except in the degree of their piety and righteousness, their fear of God and commitment to God, that all will be judged according to the degree of their good intention and good action, and their striving to do so. Such a principle automatically leads to the universal values of justice and impartiality, tolerance and peace, and love and care for all—but all need to be in the name of God and the praise and worship of God only, not in the name of any worldly authority or to show off for any worldly purpose or material gain.

It is from this sense of humility, simplicity, purity and direct accountability to God that the culture of Islamic work ethics and character building derives—a culture that finds drugs, lies, falsehoods, alcohol, abortion, pornography, open sexuality, homosexuality, prostitution, abuse of children and family breakdown extremely abominable and totally unacceptable; a culture that finds childhood innocence, childhood simplicity, childhood discipline, the institution of marriage, family values, fidelity to spouse, and the rearing of children with the utmost love and care extremely important and highly desirable.

Such a core content of Islamic system of life is naturally universally attractive and appealing and should have no problem existing side by side with other religions, monotheistic or otherwise. The very egalitarian principles of Islam and its message of hope, equality, charity, generosity, sacrifice, dignity, modesty, humility and

piety are not only highly compatible with the core values of the American/Western society but in fact provide the best solution to the problems facing the American/Western society today: despair, homelessness, loneliness, unbridled individualism, indignity of women, animal-like open sexuality and nudity, child abuse, and what not.

Zionism, Neo-Conservatism and Islam

It is for this very reason that the force of Islam and Muslims is viewed as hostile by neo-conservative fanatics of other religions and ultra-liberals, who are out there to destroy the stable and universal virtues of Islam and do everything that is subversive of what is morally right and spiritually conducive and wholesome. Like the weird sisters in *Macbeth*, for whom "fair is foul, foul is fair," the liberal extremists fare well in a state of moral chaos and confusion, which provide them with a fertile ground to fight for the reversal of timelessly revered values. They know that only in the absence of such values can their libertarian practices, epicurean desires and *carpe diem* (seize the day) ideas flourish. If the liberal elements are like the weird sisters, Jewish and Christian zealots embody spirit of the Macbeths and Lady Macbeths trying to crush what they perceive as hurdles on their way to domination without taking into account what and how the Macbeths and Lady Macbeths are likely to end up in and with.

It is also for the same reason that Islam as a panacea for the cancerous and corrosive ills of society is viewed as a rival force not only by the lobbyists of liberal agenda but also the fundamentalists of other religions who out of their dogmatic zeal simply do not want to co-exist with those who truly want to live their Islamic faith. They are not with Muslims and they are against Muslims, no matter what. They want to destroy Islam and Muslims and their houses under the pretext of containing terrorism. They cynically and shamelessly describe their heavy-handed daily massacres of Muslims and their war of aggression and invasion as their right to self-defence whereas the fight of Muslims in their own homelands for their just cause is described as terrorism. In their war against Muslims they have been joined by the forces of many secret societies like Free Masons and All Bonesmen, who fear Islam as an organized, institutionalized

force.¹⁰ Like the American administration's justification for the US military intervention in Cuba in the 1960s and later in Vietnam, they knowingly allow such terrible things as 9/11 to happen, to find or create an excuse to hold Muslims accountable and to attack them so that their rise in the world can be sabotaged and circumvented.¹¹ It is in their policy to play up their differences with Muslims and they fear sharing the credit or prospects of doing good to the society with a powerful religion like Islam lest Islam rises once again, politically, scientifically and culturally, as once it did, from the Mediterranean to the Persian, North Africa to South Asia to Southeast Asia, Andalusia to Arakan, Baghdad to Byzantium to Bihar, Damascus to Delhi to Dhaka, Istanbul to Kabul, Mali to Malaysia, and Tunis to Tashkent.

Admittedly, Muslims were once a great power. They once had a golden age. They believe that they can reclaim their lost status, that they can reinstate their former glory and dignity. That is why, in modern times, Islam and Muslims are being held hostage to the nefarious agenda of some groups and governments, especially Zionist and neo-conservative, and are being constantly terrorized by misguided "missiles" of America, the Jews, who, as the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir, puts it, "rule the world by proxy and get others to fight and die for them."¹² The Israeli state terrorism is so widespread and relentless that Muslims find themselves helpless to the point of being the scapegoat for the terrible things currently happening in the world.

In this context the role of the Jewish-controlled all-important media can be legitimately brought up. In this information age, the vital role of the mass media can hardly be exaggerated. Unfortunately, the American media mostly owned by pro-Zionist lobbies and their lackeys cannot be said to be fair and objective to the issues related to Islam and Muslims. The Masonic and Mammonite media tends to be biased against Muslims downplaying, even distorting, Muslim struggle, Muslim suffering, and Muslim achievements. It wastes no time to grab the opportunity of highlighting and propagating, through its subtle and sophisticated anti-Muslim policies and programs, what goes against Muslim interest. When there is a devastating Israeli terrorist attack against the rock-throwing Arabs with deadly missiles and machine guns,

the American media coverage is so brief and dismissive as if it was a mere surgical strike. On the other hand, when there is the slightest Muslim retaliation with pebbles and stones against the Israelis well-dug in their tanks, there is a media craze in no time—graphic, detailed, and sensationalizing. Muslim protest in the form of low-key, small-scale attacks is conducted in retaliation for massive levelling firepower of Israel (ironically meaning “peace”) protected by the American veto. Muslim blood is cheap, Muslims deserve no better than refugee camps in their own homeland, Muslim mothers’ tears are far from being precious, Muslim boys and girls are disposable plastic toys, Muslim young men are to be slaughtered, Muslim houses are to be demolished, Muslim freedom fighters are victims of witch-hunt, Muslims have no right to their homeland security—that is how Muslims are treated by some Americans and many Israelis who think Muslims are literally to be squeezed, butchered and liquidated. As a result, Palestinians, who have lost everything and who have nothing more to lose and who have no more tears left, are left with no other choice but to be martyrs (“suicide bombers”), taking their own lives as they try to kill a few of their enemies.

Such being the case, Muslims on their part should be able to use various means of technology available not only to exchange information with each other but also to counteract misinformation and distortions about them on a much larger and wider scale than they currently do. It is certainly not in the interest of the free, strong, democratic, and corporate America either to let Israel corner and push the Palestinians to the position of Shylock or to promote inaccurate pictures coloured with anti-Muslim sentiments. Prejudices must go and baseless anti-Muslim myths must be demystified and debunked.

The hostile polarization of “we” versus “they” along with the alienating and isolating process of “othering” or “otherizing” the Muslims must come to an end. The ignorant Boykins, who ignobly attack Islam as “Satan” and who most vituperatively vilify Muslims as those who worship idols, are obstacles to religious diversity and are therefore detrimental to the interest of all.¹³ They must know that Islam is the most monotheistic of all religions, believing in the most direct worship of God, not through any medium of idols, and

having no place whatsoever for idols in it. Unlike Christian churches, Hindu temples or Buddhist pagodas, Muslim mosques are open and wide and plain, having nothing, not even pictures in it, let alone idols. In fact, those who do not know about Islam should know that Islam began its journey fighting hard against idol worshipping and idol worshippers and the Prophet Muhammad (SAS) was in the forefront of this fight from the very beginning. Anyway, as the bigot and crooked Boykins, Pat Robertsons, Jerry Falwells, Billy Grahams, and Jimmy Swaggers¹⁴ should come to their senses, Muslims and Muslim rulers must stop being the golden grasshoppers degenerating into the lazy and luxurious ways of life and must instead pursue the active and dynamic ones with a sense of mission and vision.¹⁵

Concluding Remarks

In the face of on-going anti-Muslim propaganda and the American administration-sanctioned Zionist massacres and bullying threats, Muslim groups and governments, across the globe, regardless of their differences, should be united and stay united in the noble cause of Islam and Islamic culture and heritage. It is indeed the noblest cause that they can have. They must rise above their political and economic interests and make a unified stand based on their Islamic faith and principles, which will actually help their Islamic faith and morale, stay high and strong leading eventually to a state of stability, dignity and nobility. When one is bogged down in low morale and moral bankruptcy, one can never stand up with dignity and prestige. It is the strength of faith and strong moral commitment along the lines of religion and religious culture, rather than political or economic or military, that should be the foundation of Muslim groups and governments. Only such a strength rooted in faith and grounded in practice can provide the ultimate and lasting strength without which they cannot go far. They must not sacrifice their real strength to the cover of the so-called diplomatic niceties and sophistication, which will cause them to deviate from the real means and real goals. The guiding light and force should be the revealed word of God and the unshakeable faith in the word of God, meaning that all political, economic and military activities should be conducted according to the beacon of the light of Islam, not the illusory glamour and attractions of the so-called secular, ungodly and blasphemous

powers, which are at most the country fireflies, not the light of the sun and the sweetness of the moon.

In short, Muslims (individuals, groups, and governments) should speak with one voice rising over their differences, finding a mechanism to address, but not to polarize, them for the greater need of unity at least over certain political issues. They should gather strength by living their fear of God and their loyalty to Islam in every phase and every aspect of life. If all Muslims, especially the ruling governments and classes and parties, instead of giving lip service only to Islam but actually getting increasingly secular, live their commitment to Islam privately as well as publicly, socially, culturally and certainly politically, they are sure to be able to lead themselves into the future with unity and dignity. Such an Islamic culture and environment may now seem to be an impossible and unrealistic utopia to others who are not strong in faith and not sufficiently knowledgeable about Islam—especially those Muslim groups and governments who are Muslims in name only not knowing they are imprisoned in the empty shell of traditional rituals and ceremonies without actualizing the inner truth and faith of Islam. Temporal political interests have actually made them the main obstacles to lasting peace and harmony, happiness and prosperity and, above all, justice and equality eternally enshrined in the universal message of Islam.

Islam believes in the prophets previous to Muhammad (SAS) and the holy scriptures of the other monotheistic religions previous to the Qur'an. Muslims, therefore, should have no problem co-existing in peace with the Jews and the Christians and even the followers of other religions as long as all are sincere and honest in sticking to God-dictated fundamentals enshrined in their respective scriptures. Problems arise,

1. when secular values or principles, far right or far left, disturb the functional commonality and harmony of the otherwise mutually exclusive religious diversity;
2. when one, be it a government or a group or an individual, is dishonest and biased, follows opportunist policies, practices double standards, and is moved by mere worldly or political

interests and thus proves to be misleading, mischievous and manipulative, playing one group against the other, sowing seeds of discord and thereby fishing in the troubled waters it deliberately creates for its own survival and legitimacy;

3. when war against the Zionist and-neo-conservative-manufactured terrorism turns into war against Islam, and Muslims are used either as ready-made scapegoats or, to invoke Orwell, as sheep to be led by pigs as a tool of government;
4. when some Americans think, after Orwell's brutal and ruthless dictator pig Napoleon, that "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," dealing a mortal blow to the ideals of religious diversity and political equality.

Such governments or groups or individuals prevent real peace from prevailing and let the tensions and hostilities creep up among the people of various religious backgrounds, which ultimately tarnish the image of this or that religion in the eyes of its followers and those of the rest making a joke of the idea of religious diversity even on the freest and most diverse and most democratic of lands on the Earth—the United States of America!

Notes

1. While the first two quoted phrases occur in his poem *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, the last statement is from his 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*. See M. H. Abrams ed., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 4th ed., vol. I (New York: Norton & Co., 1994), 2034.
2. Quoted in Farida Hellal, "Emerson's Knowledge and Use of Islamic Literature" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Houston, 1971), 102.
3. *Understanding Islam and the Muslims*, (Washington, D. C.: The Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 1989), 51.
4. *Newsweek*, Dec 2001-Feb 2002 issue (Special Davos Edition). Huntington's essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" first appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, which was then developed into a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
5. *Newsweek*. Muslims do not and cannot believe in Fukuyama's idea of the end of history because they believe that history will come to an end with the Doomsday only and will continue to unfold until then.

6. Amber Haque ed., *Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects* (Maryland, USA: Amana Publishers, 1999); Imam Yahaya Hendi, "Islam in the United States: History, Challenges and Concerns and Islam in the United States: An Overview of Historical Moments" (Paper presented at a conference organized by Public Affairs Department, U. S. Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, September 5, 2001).
7. Jalal Uddin Khan & Adrian Hare eds., *English and Islam: Creative Encounters '96* (Kuala Lumpur: Research Center, International Islamic University Malaysia, 1998).
8. Louay M. Safi, "The Transforming Experience of Muslims" (A paper presented at a conference organized by Public Affairs Department, U. S. Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, September 5, 2001).
9. Abdelwahab Elmessiri, *The West and Islam: Clash Points and Dialogues—Features of the New Islamic Discourse*, tr. Azzam Tamimi (Cairo: The 21st Century Trust, 1997). Originally, it was a paper presented in Arabic at a conference organized by Liberty for the Muslim World in London, July 1996.
10. CBSNEWS.Com 60 Minutes, "Skulls and Bones," October 5, 2003.
11. Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba: Memorandum from L. L. Lemnitzer, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the Secretary of Defense, 13 March 1962 (now unclassified material). <http://www.american-buddha.com/cuba>. Also see online 9-11 Timeline. Summary of the 9/11 Cover-up Developed for Timeline by Paul Thompson. www.wanttoknow.info/9-11/timeline25pg www.cooperativeresearch.org/timeline. The testimonies of the members of the Bush administration to the 9/11 commission in April, 2004 prove that they knew about such an attack in advance but did nothing to stop it as if they invited and welcomed 9/11 to use it in their favor and that they were predetermined to attack Iraq and Afghanistan and thereby control the Middle East and Central Asia politically and economically.
12. Speech by Mahathir Mohammad at the 10th Summit Meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Kuala Lumpur, *New Straits Times*, (Malaysian daily) October 17, 2003.
13. According to recent media reports, US Army Lt-General William Boykin, who also serves as deputy undersecretary of defence for intelligence, cast the war on terrorism as a religious struggle between Islam and Christianity and made offensive, inflammatory remarks denigrating Islam.
14. There are many good and sensible Christians who have been relentlessly exposing and ridiculing militant Christian radicalism, extremism and fanaticism. See, for example, David S. Katz & Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millenium*, (London: Penguin, 1999/2000); Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (CT: Lawrence

Hill, 1986); Joe Edward Barnhart, *The Billy Graham Religion* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press from United Press Church, 1972; Barnhart, *The Southern Baptist Holy War: The Self-Destructive Struggle for Power Within the Largest Protestant Denomination in America*, Texas Monthly Press, 1986.

15. According to the ancient historian Thucydides, the golden grasshoppers are symptomatic of the Athenians' degeneration from Spartan to Ionic qualities, as they lay aside their arms and became weak and idle. See Elizabeth Cullingford, ed, *Yeats: Poems, 1919-1935* (A Casebook, Macmillan, 1994), p. 160.