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The Challenge of Modernity:
Shi'ah Muslim – Mennonite Christian Dialogue

Editors' Note 2

Foreword
A. James Reimer 3

Rationality, Humanity, and Modernism
Hassan Rahimpour 14

Keeping Pace with Modernity: Fifty Years of Iranian Intellectual Encounter with Modernity
Yousef Daneshvar 26

The Limits of Modernity
Phil Enns 39

From Instrumental Reason to Sacred Intellect
Hamid Parsania 54

Pluralist Culture and Truth
David W. Shenk 67

A Typology of Responses to the Philosophical Problem of Evil in the Islamic and Christian Traditions
Jon Hoover 81

Public Orthodoxy and Civic Forbearance:
The Challenges of Modern Law for Religious Minority Groups
A. James Reimer 96

Book Reviews

J. Denny Weaver. *The Nonviolent Atonement*.
Reviewed by Gerald W. Schlabach 112

David Lyon. *Jesus in Disneyland:*
Religion in Postmodern Times
Reviewed by David J. Wood 115

John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism:*
Conversations with a Radical Tradition.
Reviewed by Néstor Medina 117

Editors' Note

We are very pleased to present in this issue a unique array of papers from a recent conference that was itself a unique, groundbreaking event — an initial dialogue between Shi'ah Muslim and Mennonite scholars that took place in Toronto in Fall 2002. The conference animator, Professor Jim Reimer, outlines the character and context of the event in the Foreword which follows. There he also offers a helpful overview of the papers presented and the responses and discussion they engendered. We thank Jim for shepherding materials from the first phase of this illuminating conversation into our production process. (A second phase is scheduled for Iran in 2004.) Also included in this issue are as many book reviews as we could accommodate. We thank all our contributors. Enjoy!

C. Arnold Snyder, Academic Editor *Stephen A. Jones, Managing Editor*

FOREWORD

Shi'i Muslims and Mennonite Christians in Dialogue: Two Religious Minority Groups Face the Challenges of Modernity

A. James Reimer

Iranian Shi'ah Muslims and North American Mennonite Christians met in Toronto on 24 -27 October 2002 for a dialogue on the challenges of modernity for their respective religious communities The assumption that the two groups have no affinities with each other was quickly laid to rest during three days of intense interchange of ideas, joint worship in a mosque and a Mennonite church, common meals, forays into Old Order country, and sightseeing in the Niagara peninsula.

Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC) hosted four Muslims from Iran, two Iranian students (Muhammad Farimani and Yousef Daneshvar) now completing doctoral studies in Christian theology and philosophy of religion at the Toronto School of Theology (TST), and a number of Muslim clerics from the Toronto area. The two Toronto clerics were Dr. Kazem Mesbah Moosavi, Director and Imam of the Islamic Iranian Centre of Imam Ali, and Imam Rizvi, head of the largest Shi'ah Mosque in Toronto. Moosavi is a graduate of McGill University, and Rizvi received his masters degree from Simon Fraser University. Both have studied for many years in Qom, Iran.

The four Muslims who flew in from Iran specifically for the occasion represented the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute of Qom, the most important Shi'ah seminary for training Muslim clerics in the Arab world. This group comprised Prof. Hamid Parsania, currently President of the University of Qom; Prof. Hassan Rahimpour, presently teaching at the University of Tehran; Aboulhassan Haghani, director of international relations for the Imam Khomeini Institute; and Shuja Ali Mirza, originally from Toronto, now a student of mysticism under Parsania in Qom,who acted as translator.

Also participating were senior Mennonite administrators, scholars, and doctoral students: Jon Hoover, now teaching at Dar Comboni for Arabic Studies, Cairo, Egypt; David Shenk, for many years director of US missions and overseas ministries for Eastern Mennonite Missions, and author of books on Christians and Muslims; Ed Martin, director of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Central and Southern Asia Program, who initiated the exchange program noted below; Roy Hange, who spent ten years in the Middle East working with Muslims and Christians, and was the first Mennonite exchange representative in Iran; Bob Herr, co-director of the MCC international peace office; Lydia Harder, adjunct professor and student affairs advisor for TMTC; Jeremy Bergen, TST doctoral student and TMTC administrative assistant; doctoral student Phil Enns and advanced degree student Susan Harrison; and myself as professor and director of TMTC.

The dialogue was restricted to a small group of participants, presenting and responding to papers, with a few additional guests. It was not meant to be a general discussion between Islam and Christianity but focused on issues emerging out of unique and particular circumstances, namely an exchange program between two institutions (TMTC and the Khomeini Institute) and two traditions (Mennonites and Shi'ites).

An exchange program between MCC and the Khomeini Institute emerged out of MCC's work in Iran following a 1990 earthquake. Ed Martin observed that while MCC's work around the world relates primarily to relief and development, it also places priority on peacemaking, and sees "the kind of exchange program between people of different religious and different countries whose governments are not on the most friendly basis as an effort in peacemaking." "When we first had the idea of this kind of student exchange," Martin said, "I could not even in my dreams have thought that we would be able to have this kind of conference."

What follows in this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* are most of the major presentations given at the dialogue. Not included are the responses to the papers, with the exception of the discussion around the Rahimpour paper. In this Foreword I draw on the responses and discussions, as transcribed by Thomas Reimer, in order to give a sense of the richness of the conversation.

From the opening remarks by Prof. Rahimpour, a well-known media figure in Iran, it was evident that this would be an encounter between friendly conversation partners. I came away from the conference with a deepened impression that Mennonites and Shi'ah Muslims have one common trait: *strong moral-ethical convictions*. Theological assumptions may differ (e.g., Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and the substitutionary death of Christ) but both groups put a high premium on a virtuous life.

Rahimpour made the astonishing claim that on 80 percent of the issues in which Mennonites distinguish themselves from other Christian denominations, they and Shi'ah Muslims agree. He gave specific examples: opposition to the buying and selling of heaven; rejection of celibacy and a high view of marriage; no need for mediation to receive forgiveness of sins; primacy of Scripture; avoidance of a luxurious and ostentatious life; helping the poor and needy, and a sense of responsibility to humanity at large; a high value placed on free choice of the individual after reaching maturity; and holding faith and reason together.

What quickly emerged as a dominant theme was the different conception of the relation of faith to reason held by the modern Western and Arab world. In the west, modernity (variously understood as beginning in the late medieval Renaissance, the Reformation, or the eighteenth-century Enlightenment) has brought with it the separation of faith and reason, and religion and science, in a way foreign to Muslim cultures. For this reason, the Islamic stance toward modernity is ambiguous: neither total rejection nor full acceptance. They say no to modern secularism and rejection of God, and the accompanying moral decadence, but yes to modern science, reason, and technology.

He who does not have a correct rationality does not have a correct religion, said Rahimpour. This high view of reason presupposes a positive anthropology and high view of the natural world generally. In Western humanism, according to Rahimpour, God and humanity are at war with each other. This is not so in Islam: "In Islam the fire is not stolen from Zeus, but is given directly to man by God." The rights of human beings are not opposed to God but are a corollary of divine rights. Islamic religion came not to undermine but to safeguard and nurture the growth of humanity. Humanity is not sacrificed in order to please God, but God's pleasure consists in honoring humanity.

Although Islam has an optimistic view of humanity, it does not separate rights from responsibility, morality from economics, the world from the afterlife, or religion from government. It is through earthly government and law that religious morality is established. Perhaps the most dramatic difference between the Mennonite understanding of the Christian mandate and the Islamic vision of moral and social responsibility surfaced at this point. Both may agree that we need to work for a future world of peace and social justice, but disagree on how to get there.

Mennonites have had a historical suspicion of government and civil authorities as a means of achieving such an ideal society, and have opted for the "messianic community" (the Believers Church) or, at the least, non-governmental agencies. Rahimpour reiterated the importance of religious governments for Islam. This does not mean religion should be in the hands of the politicians or should be enforced by violence. Nevertheless, religion is concerned with establishing civil justice and civil rights. Power, wealth, and politics must be subordinated to morality. Islam does not support secularism in society, and religious and spiritual matters are not separated from material affairs. Islamic mysticism starts individually and then quickly becomes social: Live for the world as if you will live for ever; live for the next world as if you will die tomorrow.

In "Keeping Pace with Modernity: Fifty Years of Iranian Intellectual Encounter with Modernity," Yousef Daneshvar outlined major phases and factors in Iranian-Muslim response to modernity: classical, scholastic Islamic philosophy and metaphysics, which translated Plato and Aristotle into Arabic in the ninth century; the 1920s and '30s, when clerics first came into direct contact with anti-Islamic aspects of Western culture; the capitulation to western modernity under the Shah; and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 up to the present. Most recently Iranian Islamic thought has become preoccupied with hermeneutical rationality, influenced by the "Kantian distinction between the religion itself, . . . the meaning of which we have no direct access to, and our understanding of religion, which is all we have at our disposal. The former is eternally stable but the latter is constantly changing." Although Daneshvar was positively disposed toward this recent development, he criticized it for confusing hermeneutics and epistemology.

Although the Islamic scholars may not have adequately accounted for small currents or eddies of Western thought which also have a high view of reason compatible with religious faith (Princeton Fundamentalism and Mennonites are examples), on the whole they accurately depicted the dominant developments in western intellectual and religious history.

Susan Kennel Harrison, in a paper not included here, responded to Daneshvar by outlining the shifting stances of North American Mennonites to modernity, with special reference to hermeneutics. Before the twentieth century, Mennonites operated with pre-critical notions of the Bible–an idiosyncratic and non-systematic biblicism, characterized by an ethical common sense, and a principled reading of the text. In the early twentieth century, with the abrupt shift to historical consciousness and a critical hermeneutics, Mennonites scrambled to find alternative approaches, ranging from Princeton inerrancy to Dispensationalism to higher criticism. By mid-century very few pre-modern interpreters were left. While Mennonites have not developed a systematic way of holding propositional and existential readings together, their approach could be described as ethical or instrumental, one in which all believers are enfranchised to participate in the hermeneutical process. Harrison lamented the implicit anti-intellectualism in the Mennonite hermeneutical tradition, which disenfranchises the Mennonite intellectual dedicated to “obtaining a more systematic or comprehensive grasp of a body of knowledge.”

Although most Mennonites have, according to Harrison, acculturated themselves to modern North American society, they have continued to advocate alternative ways of living an obedient life to Christ that resists the priorities of dominant culture: “How we, as Mennonites, have resisted west-toxication, is quite diverse, [from] refusing to drive an automobile, to driving an automobile whose shiny chrome bumper has been painted black, to an outward conformity while maintaining distinct ecclesiological alternatives, particularly a non-sacramental approach to Christian worship. I would like to think . . . that the Mennonites and Amish have proven so far that it’s possible to live in the West and still have control over the pace of change, although the verdict is probably still out on that.”

In “The Limits of Modernity” Phil Enns most directly addressed the issue of rationality so important for the Muslims. He traced the rise and *cul-de-sac* of the modern intellectual tradition beginning with the nominalism and empiricism of Ockham and Hume; continuing in the reduction of the concept of God to a postulate necessary for ethics, not an actual existing reality, in Kant; and ending with the rejection of God as even a postulate by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Modern attempts by Marcel Gauchet and James Edwards to retain religion as a “residue” necessary for our poetic understanding of the unity of the world fall far short of making any religious truth claims.

Modernity’s fundamental problem is that it has rejected the possibility “that in religion we find a set of practices and beliefs which has traditionally provided answers to the kinds of questions that modernity has found problematic.” Modernity claims that the empirical world provides disconnected sense data, yet requires a way of organizing that data for knowledge to be possible. Traditionally, religion has provided this unifying function in the everyday lives and practices of people. We in the West cannot escape our modernity, with its commitment to liberal democracy and the progress of science, but we need not reject the notion that religion is a “world we might inhabit” that addresses “our deepest questions about the world.”

Response to Enns’s paper by Muhammad Farimani and others was vigorous. Farimani disputed Enns’s attempt to hold modernity and religion together, especially if the scientific worldview, individualism, and the denial of all transcendent authority are seen as modernity’s dominant assumptions. Attempting to answer the challenges of modernity from within modernity – i.e., a pragmatic view of religion as a set of beliefs and practices – is unworkable.

Commitment to modernity's assumptions leaves no room for religion: "If many people in the West are both religious and modern, that is not because modernity can tolerate religion; rather, it is because they are not modernist in its full sense."

Hamid Parsania, in "From Instrumental Reason to Sacred Intellect," pursued a similar theme. Identifying 18 different types of reason, he named "intuitive" and "sacred" reason as standing at the pinnacle of human rationality. Intuitive reason apprehends universal realities directly without the mediation of mental concepts. Muslim mystics believe such "supra-intellectual intuition" is obtained through a vision of the beautiful divine names and attributes. It is the existential root of conceptual reason. The highest form of intuitive reason is sacred intellect, which enables its holder to directly apprehend essences and realities that others only approach. "In religious texts, the teacher or medium for 'teaching' and conveying the sacred intellect is the Holy Spirit – Gabriel, the divine archangel." "So if metaphysical reason can prove the immateriality and eternality of the human soul, then the sacred intellect can provide the details of man's ascent and final felicity." The sacred intellect, "enlightened directly by Divine Grace and inspired by the Holy Spirit, reveals the Divine Word to man."

The problem with Western metaphysical and rational thought is that "Modernity starts with the denial of the authority of revelation and the sacred intellect." This denial has its roots in the historic suspicion by the Church of conceptual human reason, leading to an opposition between revelation and reason, what Parsania calls "two levels of rational cognition." While this opposition once worked in favor of the church, now it benefits secular reason divorced from revelation and sacred intellect. "In its turn, conceptual reason, by turning its back on intuitive and sacred intellect, has severed its existential roots and has in effect dried up and become lifeless."

In her response to Parsania, Lydia Harder lamented the historic lack of philosophical studies by Mennonites: "We live in a pre-modern world as Mennonites, in our thinking as well as in our life together in communities; what Ricoeur calls first naivete was very much a part of where we were, I think, and yet we are living in a modern world, and are affected by [it]. . . ." Harder was particularly concerned with the relation of power and reason. Parsania replied that in this sense Muslims and Mennonites are similar, in coming late to modernity and in taking for granted the validity and correctness of the sacred text. He warned Mennonites to be wise when they enter into this new stage, and not to argue only from within the dialectic of modernity and modern rationality: "[A]s long as there is consideration of the metaphysical or sacred intellect in any discourse, this intellect can make judgements on how power is to be used. The prophets and Jesus made [such] judgements, and knew [them] to be the truth." "Jesus himself is the manifestation of knowledge and awareness and is the Word, the *logos*. We know Jesus to be the Word of God. His presence in the natural world is the presence of God and is the message of God. Wherever the Word is present, that place becomes sacred, and it is with his presence that even instrumental reason becomes sacred. . . ."

In "Pluralist Culture and Truth," David Shenk argued that Muslims and Christians can both be committed to truth and affirm modern pluralist culture. The problem is disagreement about what the truth is. Muslims believe the final authority is the revealed Qur'an, Christians hold that Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible is the fullest revelation of truth. Since no one has the right to impose their view of truth on another, respect for human life, freedom, and dignity requires a pluralistic, democratic context in which different views of truth can co-exist peacefully. In Shenk's analysis, Anabaptists of the sixteenth century led the way in envisioning modern international pluralism and democratic societies in which personal freedom and choice are respected. The Anabaptist understanding of the truth of Christ rests in this commitment to redemptive, suffering love in which all imperialistic and coercive measures are rejected. The church is a pluralistic movement without linguistic, cultural, or geographical barriers.

A highly interesting discussion ensued on the nature of freedom and democracy. Parsania argued strongly that, while freedom of choice is important (without it a person is not a human being), yet to be religious and to have absolute freedom are incompatible. There is a religious or ontological understanding of personal freedom (personal faith cannot be forced), but there is also a public freedom which must be limited. Just as law enforces traffic rules, so in certain areas of public life (e.g., abortion, murder, homosexuality) rights and freedom must be restricted. This holds also for democracy; certain actions that democratic societies engage in are invalid. Here I observed that the democratic experiment in North America is quite ambiguous. Stanley Hauerwas, for example, maintains that modern democracy cannot sustain itself without reliance on violence to secure its capital, property, and resources. Thus, if Shenk's thesis is true, then Anabaptists find face a strange dilemma: they have historically contributed to liberal, democratic, and pluralistic societies which rely on violence to sustain themselves.

The problem of evil was the theme of Jon Hoover's presentation. While not directly connected with the theme of the dialogue, the problem of evil is surely pressing in the modern period. Hoover presented a typology of three models: *divine voluntarism,* in which God has exclusive freedom and power over good and evil: to inquire into God's purpose is invalid; *best-of-all-worlds theodicies,* in which God has reasons for creating a world where there is evil: evil is an instrument in making the best possible world; *free-will theodicies*, where God voluntarily limits his own freedom in order to allow for human freedom. All three have Muslim and Christian versions. Hoover opts for a fourth view, in which evil has a destabilizing function, jolting us out of complacency and propelling us to greater truth. Only God can ultimately overcome and transform horrendous evils.

Parsania, the respondent to the paper, complained that Hoover had located the Shi'ah view primarily within the third model, because he was approaching the subject from an Egyptian perspective, where the mystical-philosophical way of Islamic thinking is weak. The understanding of evil combines all three models. To deal adequately with the problem of evil would take one deeply into philosophy and mysticism. For instance, as far as divine voluntarism is concerned, it is true that one cannot question God about his motives, because God gives himself his own purpose: God is absolute perfection, love, goodness, light, and beauty.

My own paper dealt with the challenges of modern law for religious minority groups like Mennonites in North America and Shi'ah Muslims in the Arab world. Shi'ites in Iran are the majority and function within an Islamic nation state, while Mennonites emphasize the separation of church and state. One major difference between Muslims and Mennonites – a theme that surfaced at a number of points – is that, although they may have similar visions of what a future kingdom of justice might look like, they disagree on how to get there. For Muslims the modern nation state appears to be a legitimate means of achieving such a new order (although historically always in only a preliminary way); for Mennonites the church and small alternative communities are the way.

I argued that the liberal pluralism of North American democratic society, including its concept of tolerance, is really an illusion except in a most superficial sense. Every society, including our own, is governed by a dominant public orthodoxy. In our case this hegemonous orthodoxy, manifested in modern technological culture, is rooted in white, liberal Protestant values with very clear rules of exclusion and inclusion. Public law gives structure to these values, and religion plays a significant role in legitimating this cohesive, legal structure. What is often not acknowledged is, in Hauerwas's analysis, the violence intrinsic to a liberal, democratic society in its attempt to sustain itself. I suggested that it is not "toleration" but "forbearance" that needs to be exercised toward groups diverging from this orthodoxy. Forbearance rejects all use of coercion in religious matters, but presupposes an orthodoxy (truth claims) and desires the conversion of all through peaceful persuasion. Sixteenth-century Anabaptists did not espouse tolerance in the modern sense but advocated forbearance of those disagreeing with one's own understanding of the truth.

In his response, Imam Rizvi said, "I was delighted because I really get very irritated with the politically correct mantra of religious pluralism . . . , because I have seen some Muslim scholars are chanting that slogan, and they try to read religious pluralism even into the Qur'an . . . ." Asserting that I had successfully argued that pluralism is an illusion, Rizvi still wished I had elaborated on the relation of forbearance and concord, and suggested that the modern notions of tolerance and forbearance might not be as distinct as I made them out to be. He also proposed that the concepts of mercy and justice are relevant as a basis for the co-existence of the majority with the minority.

Kezam Mesbah Moosavi presented a paper on "Modernity and Contextualism," not included in this collection. He criticized the modern concept of contextual theology and with it the notion of the suffering God as developed especially by Canadian theologian Douglas Hall and German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, claiming that such a theology leads to "arbitrary historicism" and "capricious relativism." "I believe that my fellow Christian Mennonites cannot agree with [the] contextualization of God. None of us are ready to buy this product of Modernity; none of us [can accept the description] of God as . . . poor, weak, and suffering." He proceeded to show why such contextualization of God is unacceptable to Muslims. Although admitting that theology does change and is partially contextual, he maintained that it "contains some fixed principles . . . . Whether it challenges the attributes of God or his immutability, theology cannot and must not deny, for example, the existence of God."

Roy Hange identified in his response a significant difference between the Christian and the Muslim view of God. Christians, while holding to the transcendence of God, nevertheless think of God in Jesus as entering the human situation of suffering and oppression, thereby transforming them toward a new kind of relationship among humans and between humans and God. In the cross, "where the *logos* and the Word and the will of Jesus were present, there was a power for the healing of nations, social systems, and family systems, where the abuse of power is always present because we are all human." Hange went on to say, "I readily acknowledge and affirm Islam's hesitance to associate anything with God, but I struggle as a Christian in knowing and affirming that the way of the cross was an attempt to associate God with human suffering and passion, [one] that forced us to see our own abusive power and sinfulness, and I think that is how Christians can see the glory of God in the cross as a way to break cycles of violence that happen because of the abuse of power." "Any revolution – whether American or Communist or even Islamic – can get caught in a dialectical trap [of] needing to present an antithesis and sometimes needing to use violent means to do that. I say this all as the descendent of the last person killed by the Christian authorities in Switzerland for his religious beliefs, when they thought they were giving glory to God for doing so."

Parsania's retort was perhaps the clearest articulation of the differences between Mennonites and the Shi'ah Muslims present. God, he said, can manifest himself in numerous ways in the created world, as he has done in Jesus, the prophets, Muhammad. But God's essence can never thus be associated with anything human and finite. The human being can only manifest the divine when the human person is totally annihilated. God can "sometimes manifest himself in the sword of the fighter, and sometimes he manifests himself in the blood of the martyrs. He manifests himself in Christ when he was crucified, and also in the sword of Muhammad the prophet when he fought to uphold justice. God loves all who fight for his cause. What's important is that we become servants, and we must not impose our will on God, we must open ourselves so that the will of God can be seen in us." I made the point that "the cross is one moment in the life of God, but you can't talk about the doctrine of the cross, in our theology, without a doctrine of resurrection, which is the glorification of Christ and of God."

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There may have been too much "forbearance" in this first encounter, since the tough issues were never addressed (e.g., violation of human rights in western and Arab countries, the role of women, missions and conversion, terrorism and war, and serious theological differences between Islam and Christianity on "missionizing and conversion," and on the means of achieving a kingdom of peace and social justice. Some of these difficult topics were alluded to in the general wrap-up session on Saturday afternoon, as issues to be addressed in future phases of the dialogue. On Friday evening, a panel discussion, Shi'ah-Muslims and Mennonite-Christians: How Do Our Religious Convictions

Contribute to Peace-building?, with few exceptions dwelt on joint concerns for peace and justice, not on conflictual matters.Later, a number of us addressed the Islamic congregation at a celebration of the birth of the twelfth Imam, at the Toronto mosque of which Moosavi is the head. Muslims believe that the twelfth Imam will return with Jesus at some future time to set up an earthly kingdom of justice.

Sunday morning we all travelled to the Tavistock, Ontario Mennonite Church, where Rick Cober Bauman was the worship leader. The array of Muslim clerics (some wearing white turbans), MCCers, and other Muslim and Mennonite dialogue partners, sitting in a single row on the platform facing this rural congregation for the adult Sunday School hour, was a sight to behold. It was a question-and-answer situation, and to the question, Why such a dialogue?, my answer was: "Both traditions believe in one God, and truth is truth no matter where it is found; both traditions are in search of this truth." Sunday afternoon we visited an Old Order Mennonite farm north of Waterloo, arranged by Cober Bauman. The photographs we took, including the one gracing the cover of this issue, reveal the Muslims in their more casual, informal, and unguarded moments, enjoying the horse and buggy — and surprised that in the middle of modern, decadent North American society there is a people not unlike Muslims in Iran, trying to live out a simple, faithful, and pious life.

Invited inside the farmer's modest home, and sitting in a circle around the Mennonite couple with their two small children, the Muslims asked questions like: Why do you not have modern technology? Why do you not have electric lights? The Old Order family's answer was "Because that is what our church teaches." This surprised and delighted the visitors. Here in the midst of North American culture, known for its individualism, was an example of objective authority and beliefs taking precedence over individual beliefs. "When these people die they will go straight to paradise," commented one Muslim.

The visit ended with the farmer taking us to the local one-room Mennonite school house, where the Muslims left their names in Arabic on the blackboard. I would like to have seen the surprise of the teacher and pupils on Monday morning! The official Iranian visit concluded with a trip to Niagara Falls and a well-to-do, middle-class Niagara Mennonite home, a stark contrast to the Old Order home of the previous day. I tried to explain the wide range of groups making up the Mennonite spectrum. (I have since heard that Professor Rahimpour has been seen on Iranian TV, lecturing on Canadian "Amish" Mennonites).

Part II of this Shi'ah Muslim – Mennonite Christian dialogue will occur ("God willing" or "Insha'Allah," as Muslims say) in Qom, Iran, in February 2004. A fitting conclusion to this account of Part I of the dialogue is this remark by the Khomeini Institute's director of international relations: "During the past five years since our student exchange program was initiated between the MCC and the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, a sincere fraternal affection has taken root in our hearts for our Mennonite friends, coupled with respect and admiration for the virtue we see them display in our interactions with them; and so it is with great satisfaction that we see our friendship deepening and expanding on the firm basis of our common faith in God."

Rationality, Humanity, and Modernism

Dr. Hassan Rahimpour

Dr. Rahimpour's paper, as written, comprised four parts. At the conference, he gave his audience this outline: "The first part concerns the definition of modernity. . . . In the second part I will discuss the [dual] approach that we have, or that Muslims have, to the problem and the fact that it's not a case with regard to modernity of [our] saying yes or no, but rather a case of saying yes and no. The third part will discuss issues of epistemology, modernity, and rationalism. The fourth part will concern man and God in modernity, and in this part there will be talk of humanism and human rights, and the second sub-topic will be the [Protestant] Reformation. [Also] the similarities between the Shi'ah Muslims and the Mennonites, with regard to the Reformation, will be discussed. . . ." In the paper as actually delivered, Dr. Rahimpour used the services of a translator, and in the reduced time available had to limit himself to discussing only some of the topics examined at greater length in his manuscript. What follows below is an edited version of the paper as delivered.
– Editor

Dr. Hassan Rahimpour, an expert in Islamic literature, philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence, teaches at the University of Tehran, Iran.

In the name of God, the Beneficent and the Merciful.

I am very lucky to have the opportunity to speak to the Mennonite community here. The more the various windows and apertures of outlook to various cultures become open, the more it becomes clear at long last that the desires and truths we all seek are the same. If there [were more] dialogue in the world today, then man would not be forced to use weapons as much, as he would be able to use words in place of weapons. I am hopeful that these types of meetings and dialogues will continue, so that we can find our points of commonality and our points of divergence. Our points of commonality will bring us closer together, and our points of divergence won't lessen the friendship that we have. They will instead increase the opportunities for further thought and contemplation. . . . The topic of my discussion is Islam and modernity, rationality and humanism, or intellectualism and humanism.

Modernity, from the aspect of its ambiguity and variegated scope, has been compared to an accordion. It expands and contracts, playing many different tunes. "Modernity" is a multi-purpose label that is applied to many different and sometimes contradictory things. If modernity has somehow removed doubt in the Christian West, it has nonetheless created many ambiguities in the Muslim East.

What differentiates a modern phenomenon from one that is not modern? Is it a specific time, or exact historical event? Does it hinge upon any particular philosopher, theologian, or artist? or perhaps a certain place? Did modernity and the modern age begin in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, with the advent of the Renaissance and the revival of the humanism of antiquity in Italy? Was it then just a phenomenon restricted to literature and art, both the plastic arts and the canvas arts? Or did modernity begin with the Reformation of the sixteenth century, in defiance of the Catholic church in Rome, and the consequent appearance of Protestantism in Germany and England? Could it have been later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Descartes, Kant, Hobbes, Locke, Galileo, Newton, that it got its inspiration? Perhaps it was at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth centuries, at the time of industrial revolution and accompanying the formation of factories, new trades and industries, and the phenomena of organization in Europe. Or possibly the politics of republicanism in France and America ushered in the modern age.

[More questions abound.] In the realm of art, is it the realism of Courbet that best symbolizes modern painting, or the impressionism of Monet, or perhaps the abstract expressionism of Pollock? Was it Woolf, Joyce, or Hemingway who defined modern literature? Was it the counter melodies and off-key sounds of Schoenberg that were genuinely modern, or was it Stravinsky who revolutionized classical music? Is modern architecture seen in the works of Gropius or better in those of le Corbusier? In the area of religion, we could ask if tolerance and lenience is characteristic of modern religion, if religious tolerance increased in the sixteenth century (the century of reform), and which of the denominations that took shape in that century is truly representative of modern religion. What was the real and original purpose of defying the authority of the church?

In philosophy, is modern epistemology to be marked by the inductive methods of Bacon or the deductive ones of Descartes? Is classical British empiricism modern? Is positivism? As for the epistemological method of Locke or Berkeley, Hume, or Spinoza, or the critiques of Kant— which is more modern? The same can be asked of French neo-skepticism and relativism, English experientialism, German idealism, or American pragmatism. Does modernity claim the absolute possibility of knowledge, or its absolute impossibility?

Turning to the most significant social movements in the West, we observe that fascism, Stalinism, and liberalism are all products of the modern world. By way of imperialism they all made it to Islamic lands, where we have experienced them first-hand. In the philosophy of politics, is it centralization or decentralization and the distribution of power that characterizes modern government? Is it Rousseau's social contract, Locke's liberalism, or Marxist socialism, that is modern? Utopia or the opposite of utopia? Ideology or its absence? Democracy or totalitarianism? Capitalism or socialism? Nationalism or internationalism and globalization? We could also ask if it is Kant's practical morality that is modern, or Carnap's positivistic morality. Is modern morality made by defining, as Bentham and Mill did, the moral good to come from pleasure and benefit, whether social or individual, or is it a matter of feelings and intuitions? Is it a matter of natural morality, evolutionary morality, or moral nihilism?

In the mythology of the Greece of antiquity, man and the gods were at war with each other, the rule of the heavens was totalitarian, and the freedom and ability of man was basically an attack upon the authority and sanctity of the gods. Man, who wanted freedom, was somebody who had risen against the gods. If he wanted to be in charge of his own destiny and of nature, then he would have to take over the place of the gods, including Zeus. Humanism in the west started off from this negative and pessimistic outlook with regard to the heavens. Prometheus gave the gift of fire from heaven to the people on earth, and by doing so he betrayed the gods. But in the Qur'an, the divine fires are equated with divine wisdom, which God has given directly to man. God calls the people from the darkness to the light.

In western humanism, god and man are enemies of one another, but in the Qur'an God instructs and orders the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam. It was Satan, because he did not prostrate himself, who was removed from the divine presence and sanctity. God has called Adam to be the teacher of the angels, and has said that if there is no intellectuality [to that teaching], what [will be taught] is very base and profane. The Prophet of Islam has said that he who does not have a correct intellect and rationality has no religion. God has given permission in the Qur'an for man to control his own environment and to subordinate nature to his desires without oppression or misuse. God also has not prohibited beauty and pleasure from man. The God of the Prophet did not disparage man and did not become an enemy of man's intellect. The management and ordering of nature is not regarded as opposed to man's spirituality.

Nor are human rights seen as diametrically opposed to the rights of God. Rather, human rights are just a branch and corollary of divine rights. In Islam, things such as power, pleasure, and wealth, and nature and sensuality, are not in themselves essentially lowly or profane. It is rather how we approach them, how we use them, that decides their nature and whether they end up becoming satanic or divine. For this very reason we cannot assign to God the responsibility of any corruption in society. Evil is not innately and intrinsically within nature . . . . The same is true with regard to society. To become closer to God, it is not necessary to leave nature. Rather, by [applying] divine morality and the law of God, we can become closer to him.

Thus Islamic humanism is not in opposition to religion or materialism. The respect and honor of man is not gained by rising in opposition to God. Islamic law arose to save and safeguard the nobility of man. Religion is the way to the growth of man, not to its undermining. "Original sin" does not mean that all human beings are sinners and lowly. God does not manifest himself by sacrificing man; rather, the pleasure of God is obtained by serving humanity and man. By proving and demonstrating the prophethood of prophets, we are really proving or establishing the reality of man. Man, in Islam, can change his human condition, his destiny, and it was God who gave him this power. In turn, man is asked to be responsible. Islam wants man to be God's representative, and to reach such a moral and spiritual stage that no longer is there bloodshed in the world, no right that is taken wrongfully, and no-one who is left hungry, downtrodden, or without shelter.

Islam has an optimistic outlook towards man, but it does not differentiate man's rights from his responsibilities; and it does not separate reality from values, the world from the afterlife, morality from economy, piety from politics, or religion from government. To separate these ideas and entities is to separate the wholeness that is man and to take apart religion. We believe in religious government, but not that religion should be used as a tool in the hands of politicians or be enforced by the use of power. Worship in Islam is not just prayers. It also the attempt to establish justice and to obtain the rights of people; power and wealth must be subordinated to issues of morality. Mysticism in Islam is not about going away and being by yourself; it is not individualistic. It may start that way but it very quickly becomes social. When this happens, then helping the poor and fighting wars for the establishment of justice becomes worship, and becomes mystical.

If Christianity or Buddhism or other religions can come together with secularism, Islam cannot do so, because Islam does not distinguish matters of spirituality from matters of the material world. . . . In Islam, bread is not separated from morality, because human rights do not pertain only to the earth and this order, but are a sacred affair. There is a tradition from the Prophet which says, in effect, that the sanctity of a human being is greater by many degrees than the sanctity of the kaaba. Human rights, its definition and what it involves, will change according to how we define the human being. If we define man [only] as an animal who makes tools, [then] homosexuality, abortion, and the nuclear destruction of other peoples in the name of democracy become counted as a part of human rights. But if we define man in a divine way, there will be differences among the rights that follow from this definition.

In Islam, it is impossible to take away human rights from a human being. But these rights are not such that they can be established by way of invention; they are not conventional, nor can they be taken away by convention. Human rights at root are divine. Man in the world must reach perfection, but he cannot achieve that goal except by carrying out his responsibility to God and to people. But he cannot carry it out without also having achieved his worldly or material wants. This is why the Qur'an says that the prophets come for three things: to purify the soul, to teach wisdom, and to uphold justice. If a prophet of Islam formed a government, it was for these same reasons. The relationship between this world and the afterlife or other world is not oppositional, nor is it against progress. All the projects and plans foreseen in any acts of progress usually take into account only the forty or fifty years in which a person is normally alive. But this [ignores] the fact that man is an eternal being.

We are in the middle of two opposing trends: one is the eastern philosophies, mysticisms, which do not take into account the reality of the material world at all; the other is Western humanism, which sees only the life of this world and does not see man as an eternal being. To paraphrase a tradition from the Prophet: You must live in this world as if you were going to live in it forever (with regard to planning and so on, for your life here), but you must live for the other world as if you were going to die tomorrow.

Islam, while it is a religion which is for the individual and a religion of worship and morality, is also a social and political religion, and a religion which creates governance. If the *raison d'être* of secularism is to remove violence and war, Islam has an answer and a solution to those problems without needing to use secular methods. If secularism has come to put forward its program of progress, Islam also has its own program of progress without the need for secular ideology. Similarly, if what we mean by humanism is the safeguarding of the sanctity of a human being and humanity, in that sense we are humanists. But if humanism is taken to mean opposition to God and the afterlife, and if it is a call to worship humanity, then we are not humanists. If rationalism or intellectualism means having respect for the intellect, then we are rationalists; but if means rejecting inspiration and revelation, then we are not. In the same way, if instrumental reason is understood to mean living correctly and in an orderly fashion, then we are believers in instrumental reason; but if it implies opposing the higher levels of the intellect and the sacred intellect, then we do not accept it.

As well, if individualism is taken to mean freedom of choice and the creativity of the human spirit, then we are individualists; but if it implies hedonism — that is, the individualism of liberal capitalism — then we are not individualists. If to be worldly means allowing certain pleasures in this world, then we are worldly, since we do not know pleasure to be an absolute taboo. But if to be worldly means to forget about the afterlife and anything higher than this world and its pleasures, then we are not.

With regard to the final part [of my paper as written] on the similarities between Islam and the Mennonite denomination, I [have] noticed that on eighty percent of the issues where the Mennonites distinguish themselves from other Christian denominations, the perspective of the Shi'ite Muslims is the same.

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Respondent 1

Your comments about the Anabaptists and the Shiites having eighty percent convergence is something that I have often felt in relationship to Islam. Particularly, the deep concern in Islam about the unity of everything under God and within his kingdom is [also] a deeply felt Anabaptist conviction. [So too is the idea] that the kingdom to come at the conclusion of history really begins in the presence of the kingdom breaking through now. . . . It seems to me it would be helpful for Muslims and Anabaptists to reflect in some depth as to the insights of Qur'anic anthropology. . . . You're touching a very deep issue when you say that when the person is viewed only as material, it becomes catastrophic. I feel very deeply about this, having lived in the former Soviet Union for four years, and [having seen] what happened in a whole culture when a person is viewed only as material. Your very profound statement calls for a critique of that kind of understanding.

Respondent 2

On the accordion of modernity, what notes is Islam willing to play? That is, you said Islam says yes *and* no to modernity. How do you say yes?

Rahimpour *(translated)*

[Consider] certain characteristics of modernity and modernism: rationalism and scientism, induction, skepticism in Christian theology, instrumental reason, technology, urbanization, the division of labor and organization, the bureaucracy of Weber, individualism, humanism, freedom, secularism, liberal catholic democracy, the free market, consumerism, and progress. These characteristics can be divided into two general sections: one part involves the definition of intellect, its powers and potentials; the second part involves the definition of man, his rights and ability. With regard to the ideas just listed, we have a [two-pronged] approach. On some of them, we have similarities with the modern west, and in others we are closer to the Christian perspective. On other issues and items, we are close to both opinions. . . .

The revolutionary changes that have taken place in the West are understandable to us. It is possible that we are critical of a certain part of [those changes], but they [do] have a logical sequence to them. I'm not sure that what history has said about the dark ages is accurate, and whether or not they were as dark as they are portrayed to be. But what we see in the history of western civilization is that man can be viewed as a single individual. This individual in the middle ages was fanatical and a follower of authority; he didn't use his reason and he didn't know his rights. But this same person in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries became more critical of tradition. Now the movement was away from the Christian tradition towards a mentality of critique and criticism. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, non- or anti-religious intellectuals who rose in rebellion [appeared] for the first time. Humanistic revolutions and freedom-seeking movements also arose at this time. The nineteenth century is a century of ideologies, with the secular ideology coming out in the open as anti-religious. It was in the twentieth century that some of these ideologies became empowered, such as Stalinism and fascism. At the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, it was openly acknowledged that the project of modernity was at its end.

If we take these two basic points of reference [as] pillars, one being the intellect and the other being humanity, Islam does not distinguish between reason and faith. This separation started in the middle ages, but it was [only] in the modern era that figures such as Hume and Kant turned it into a theory. In fideism, whether of the type of Kierkegaard or of Wittgenstein, there is no separation between reason and religion or reason and faith.

And [again], with regard to human rights, the worship of God is not diametrically opposed to humanism. If we want to extend the realm of human beings, it is not necessary to constrict the realm of God.

Respondent 3
You were talking about man's rights not being opposed to God's rights. How does that relate to the idea of humans as co-creative with God? (So that the life of humankind, of the believer, is working in conjunction with divine purposes, working together in creating creation.)

Rahimpour *(translated)*
If what you mean by cooperation is that man is cooperating in the act of creation, then we do not believe in this. God in his act of creation is not in need of any other agent. But if you mean, what is the position or status of humanity and of the human being in the eyes of God, and what is the role of man in the whole story of creation, then we can say that in the Qur'an, the forbidden fruit was not the intellect, was not reason, but was rather oblivion and forgetfulness. Man, in the Qur'an, is defined as the most noble and highest of all of God's creation. God wants man to be his symbol on earth. Man can become this through a certain superior morality. A tradition of the Prophet has God saying, "Oh, my servant, obey me so that I can make you of my own kind, or godlike." This refers to the same way that [from an Islamic perspective] Jesus was made to carry out certain divine acts and functions. The only difference is that he was one of the creations of God, that he was a created being, that he performed functions and acts which were of a divine nature, such as bringing back to life from death. This is why the Qur'an calls Jesus the Spirit of God, and the Word of God.

Respondent 4
The statement that probably there's eighty percent convergence between the Shi'a and the Mennonites reminded me of an incident that I once witnessed. The director general for international affairs of the Iranian Red Crescent Society spoke to the executive committee of the MCC board, and one of the members asked him, "What should I think when I see Iranians on TV saying, 'America the great Satan' or 'Death to America'?" He thought a bit and said, "The more that I have learned to know the Mennonites, the more I think that probably you object to the same kinds of things in American society and culture as we in Iran do." Another example of this convergence.

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In the discussion, Prof. Rahimpour elaborated further on some points of commonality between Shi'ah Muslims and Mennonites. The following is an edited version of his remarks. Headings supplied by CGR.— Ed.

There are certain issues where Mennonites and Shi'ites differ, and on those issues we can't come to a common agreement and must take sides. [However,] there are some common points, and I'm going to list a few of them.

1. Government and the People We do not believe that by establishing a government all the difficulties of humanity will disappear. Establishing a humane, good, and just government is very difficult. We also believe that we must start with small communal or community projects. But this is [only] a good start, it's not the end. From what I hear, Mennonites were always an oppressed minority. Mennonites may be pessimistic with regard to government because of this historical experience. Dr. Reimer said it is not possible to arrive at the ideal utopia using the nation state. He didn't say we mustn't do it, he said it can't be done. We also agree that a government that is one hundred percent good is impossible.

2. Use of Violence The valid or just defense by nations of their own security is a very difficult question. It is not so much that we want to endorse violence, but what we're saying is that the defense mechanism of humanity must not be totally put aside. {Consider] AIDS: What it does in a human being's body is get rid of its immune (defense) system and make it vulnerable to all different types of bacteria and disease. The idea of jihad is the idea of defending the state from oppression. . . . The good morality Mennonites have is exactly the spirit that all the prophets from Abraham, Moses, Noah, Jesus and Mohammed have wanted to create in man. We mustn't kill so easily, take another human life so easily, because life is sanctified. We must defend life.

3. Worship and the Believer What I've heard about the Mennonites is that you are opposed to the organized form of worship of, say, the Catholic church, and the bartering of salvation. You also oppose the rule that Catholic priests are not allowed to get married, because you don't see marriage to be something that would take a person away from God. You don't see it to be an impure or lowly act. We in Islam also believe that for worship and for repentance, there is no need for mediation. We also believe that confession can only be done in front of God and no one else. We don’t believe that a person should go and confess in front of another human spiritual authority. Repentance and forgiveness is available to all. Marriage is allowed priests with the condition that they don’t go overboard.

4. Role of Scripture Some people might see this as a form of fundamentalism. but it’s our belief that referring to scripture, or being based in scripture, is to live a life according to the divine will. We believe that the Qur’an must be for the very fabric of our daily life. We are not opposed to the Qur’an being translated . . . . but to understand the text we must know Arabic and the Arabic culture of the time. We know the audience of the Qur’an to be all people and all humanity. Every individual believer has the right to read the Qur’an, and an interpretation of the Qur’an must take place according to the time in which it is being done. . . The nature and methodology of the interpretation of scripture is a very exact science we can’t go into here.

5. Lifestyle Mennonites are against living a luxurious, wasteful, and ostentatious life. This is also an Islamic value, but of course not all Islamic values are put into practice in Islamic society.

6. Helping the Poor and Needy We have heard that various Mennonite groups go all around the world helping other people. This humanitarianism is also one of the moral virtues of Islam. The Prophet of Islam has said that if in your city there is a person who is hungry and you are not aware of that person or not helping that person, then you are not of me, you are not of my community. Helping the poor without humiliating and belittling them is something that is necessary and called for in Islam. We’re all responsible, and governments are more responsible than individuals.

7. Family and Marriage The integrity of family is one of the more important values in Islam. Consider some of the advice [given] in Islam for dealing with women. The interaction between men and women should not go out of the human sphere and become banal and animalistic. Woman must not be turned into a commodity, because if this happens then the first insult will be to woman herself and the family structure would break apart.

8. Responsibility toward Humanity Both Mennonites and Muslims have a sense of this.

9. Baptism and Maturity Mennonites believe that baptism should occur only after maturity and with the decision and free choice of the individual, of the worshiper. In Islam also it is only with the advent of maturity that religious responsibility becomes obligatory for a boy or a girl. Of course, from a legal point of view, a child that is born into a Muslim family is Muslim in that sense, but as far as responsibility for carrying out the acts of religion, the responsibilities of religion, that doesn't come until maturity.

10. Private Property [*This point was not fleshed out.*]

11. Intellect and Faith, or Reason and Faith Shi'ite thinkers are rationalists, but they're not Cartesian. [Like Mennonites] they do not [take] reason to be sufficient in and of itself. In fact, they don't see the higher levels of the intellect to be sufficient without faith being involved. Faith, according to us, is not just a verbal discourse, it's not just words. Without sincerity, the intellect and reason is of no value. The Qur'an says that it is a guide for the pious.

12. Pluralism Pluralism, [as understood using] the meaning which Dr. Reimer enunciated, is [something else we have in common]. *See Reimer's article in this issue.–Ed.*

Cover Photo: Iranian scholars visit an Old Order Mennonite farm in Waterloo County. L-R: A bemused onlooker, Hamid Parsania, Hassan Rahimpour, Aboulhassan Haghani, Ed Martin, Jim Reimer, Muhammad Farimani, Yousef Daneshvar. Photo supplied by TMTC.

Keeping Pace with Modernity:
Fifty Years of Iranian Intellectual Encounter with Modernity

Yousef Daneshvar

I

Like any other cultural change, Iranians' intellectual encounter with modernity cannot be traced to a single event or cause as its starting point. However, a roughly fifty-year history can be ascribed to this encounter. Owing to the strong history of rationalism in Shi'ah Islam, Iranian scholars took the intiative to meet the challenges at the level they were posed by modernity. Seen from this angle, two phases are detectable in this encounter. In the first phase, beginning with the early 1950s, the encounter took place at the level of epistemology. In the second phase, which began in the early 1960s, it was extended far beyond the philosophical concerns and took on a hermeneutical character. Ever since then, epistemology and hermeneutics have been the main components of religious discourse in Iran. This paper explores the last fifty years of Shi'ite response in Iran to modernity. Before getting down to the main discussion, I wish to briefly elaborate upon two major determining factors in this response.

1. The substantial encounter between Iran and modernity started, as commonly understood, from the two Perso-Russian wars caused by the Russian invasion of Iran's northern border in the early nineteenth century. The wars ended in 1813 and 1828 with the victory of Russia. The aftermath for Iran was two humiliating peace treaties according to which Iran lost extensive parts of its territory, including Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ever since then, the relationship between Iran and the West has never been equal; it has rather been one in which one side, the West, has always sought domination over and exploitation of the other, Iran. Therefore, Iran first met the West as an expansionistic, colonialist, and imperialist power, through which it consequently encountered modernity. This has been exacerbated since the

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1930s when the West took on supporting an oppressive domestic dictatorship until the victory of the Islamic Revolution (1979). Only in the last decade have Iranians looked beyond the unpleasant face of the West directly into the face of modernity. This means that any study of the Iranian Shi'ite[1] response to modernity runs the risk of abstractness if it does not take into consideration the Iranian experience of the West since Russia's invasion.

2. Up until the mid-nineteenth century the clerical institution (*rouhaniyyat*) was much more than just a religious institution. It was the only cultural force responsible for education and thought-producing activities in Iran. The nineteenth-century encounter with imperialism, coupled with the severe feebleness of Qajar kings (shahs) in the face of this grave threat, added to the clerics' duties the leadership of anti-imperialist resistance in the country. The top clerics (*ulama*) became the national leaders who led people in their resistance against the political, economic, and cultural domination of the West. They even became the leading figures in defending the territorial integrity of the country against foreign military attacks.

Among the first impacts of contact with the West on Iran's intellectual and cultural texture was the emergence of a new type of thinker who became known as *roushanfikrs* (a term literally meaning "the enlightened"). These were people who had more direct contact with the West, often by traveling to a Western country. They usually knew at least one European language — French, English, Russian, or German. Therefore, the roushanfikrs were relatively familiar with Western culture and thought. The huge gap they saw between their country and Western countries in terms of science, technology, economy, effectiveness of governments, and so on left them with two tough questions: Why are we so backward? and How can we get out of this misery, to become a developed nation?

Roushanfikrs typically believed that the way to achieve progress was to imitate its prototype, the West. Accordingly, religion was regarded as an obstacle to modernizing Iran and should be eliminated. After all, from their perspective, this was the way the West had progressed. As to their personal confessions they included agnostics, deists, or materialists. In the early twentieth century some roushanfikrs emerged who kept their Islamic convictions but looked for a way to put together Islam and the achievements of modernity. Initially the roushanfikrs were not accepted by the clerics and people, but after the subsequent modernization of the education system and the expansion of contacts with the West, this new intellectual force was strengthened. In view of the huge differences between this new force and its traditional counterpart, the cleric, the inception of debate between them was inevitable. Despite this, there have been some chapters in the recent history of Iran that have been written by their uneasy alliance. The Iranian response to modernity is shaped mostly by the debates, dialogues, and the moments of divergence and convergence between these two forces, *roushanfikrs* representing modernity and *rouhaniyyun* representing Islamic tradition.

II

The 1920s and 1930s mark events that brought the clerics into direct contact with the anti-Islamic manifestations of Western culture. These events followed the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-79) in line with the desires and plans of Britain after a period of turmoil in Iran. This was the official end of the Qajar dynasty which, although dictatorial and severely impotent, was not dependent in its existence and subsistence to a foreign power as the Pahlavi dynasty was. Reza Shah (1878-1944), the first king of the dynasty, started modernizing Iran according to his poor understanding of modernity: in 1928 he passed a “dress law” which restricted the use of the clerical robe to a limited number of the clerics; in 1929 he banned the Muharram celebration; in 1936 he ordered women unveiled, and so forth. This left no doubt in the clerics’ mind that modernity meant secularization not just of politics but of all aspects of life. Thus the rouhanniyun were seeing first hand what their intellectual counterparts spoke of.

The first intellectual response to this phase of modernization was Ayatollah Khomeini’s *Kash fal-Asrar* [The Unveiling of the Mysteries] (1944). The book responded to the anti-Islamic assertions of some roushanfikrs and severely criticized the then-existing trend of secularization in Iran. To this point, the philosophical foundations of modernity had not been addressed, mostly because the staunch proponents of modernity, the roushanfikrs, were not philosophically informed.

A full confrontation with modern philosophical thinking was stimulated by a Marxist party named Tudeh (the mass), but this did not start until the early 1950s. Tudeh was established in 1941 when the Allies, including Russia, occupied Iran, forcing Reza Shah to abdicate his power, and placed Muhammad Reza, his son, on the throne. The party blatantly supported the interests of the Soviet Union, but its importance in the history of Iran lies elsewhere. Tudeh propagated various tenets of Marxism such as dialectical materialism, socialism, and historical materialism. Understandably, clerics were surprised by the explosion of a deeply anti-Islamic ideology boosted by the socialist slogans that were extremely alluring to the youth. Above all, most of the ideas were unfamiliar to the clerics at the time.

Almost a decade was spent in dogmatic defense, simply because no philosophical response was available. That this line of defense gave way in just one decade to a philosophical response can be accounted for by the presence of Shi'ah rationalism in Qom seminary at the time. This rationalism was equipped with, and informed by, scholastic Islamic philosophy, which was to be invoked in this battle. Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Tabatabaei (1903-81), the most prominent master of Islamic philosophy at the time, and his distinguished student, Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari (1920-79), took on the burdensome task of an intellectual confrontation with Marxism.

The scholastic Islamic philosophy as it stood, however, could be of little help. It was a highly scholarly discipline with a technical language restricted to a few professors and students in the seminaries. The battleground, however, was much larger than that, since the anti-Islamic publications of the Tudeh party and other roushanfikrs were circulated in many cities. They were read and understood by a large number of the educated youth. Thus an updated translation of Islamic philosophy was urgently needed. Despite the hardship this translation task involved, it was not the hardest one; another much more demanding task was yet to be undertaken. The latter task was concerned with the shortcomings of Islamic philosophy in epistemology, which was going to be methodologically the first and most crucial battle in this dispute.

III

A short introduction to scholastic Islamic philosophy is in order here. Islamic philosophy is a system of metaphysics which arose shortly after translations into Arabic of such Greek philosophers as Plato and Aristotle were made in the ninth century. Greek philosophical ideas underwent a drastic change in the hands of Muslim philosophers inspired by the Qur'an and the hadith (tradition). This system had continued as one current of thought alongside theology, mysticism, and jurisprudence. At times scholastic Islamic philosophy struggled with them and occasionally allied with some of them. Scholastic Islamic philosophy is the product of immense changes made in the imported germinal Greek philosophy and the outcome of the different kinds of relationship it had with the other Islamic strands of thought. Of particular significance was its merger with theology in the thirteenth century by Khwajeh Nasir Tusi (1201-74) and its combination with Islamic mysticism in the seventeenth century by Sadr al-Din Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra (1572-1641). Mulla Sadra put an end to a long dispute between the two main philosophical trends that existed before him: peripatetic philosophy (*mashsha'i*) and illuminationism (*hikmat al-ishraq*). The embodiment of all these innovations was what he named "transcendent philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-muta'aliyah*), which has been prevailing ever since. Transcendent philosophy can be seen as a system of rational theology arranged in two main parts: "theology in the general sense" and "theology in the specific sense."

"Theology in the general sense" tackles "the properties of existence *qua* existence." It comprises such issues as "existence" and "quiddity" and how they are connected in the makeup of each individual being; causation and different types of cause and effect; change and motion; and so on. It also includes subsections in which human knowledge is mainly ontologically investigated. The output of "theology in the general sense" is to be utilized in "theology in specific sense," which investigates issues concerning God, such as proofs of the existence of God, the divine attributes, and the relation between God's nature and his attributes.

Unlike Islamic philosophy, the materialist philosophy disseminated by the Tudeh party was upheld by an already developed epistemology, allegedly based on modern science and grounded in empiricism, and a Marxist sociology of knowledge. Allamah Tabatabaei and Ayatollah Mutahhari were quick to understand that if they were to seriously challenge this philosophy they had to face it first at the level of epistemology. However, Islamic philosophy was mostly ontology. Thus, they had to pave the way from ontology to epistemology.

IV

Epistemological Development

Allamah Tabatabaei and Ayatollah Mutahhari started to actualize the epistemological potential of the Islamic philosophy. This epistemology, which is still in the process of becoming, was expanded later on by the above-named sages and other philosophers like Ayatollah Mahdi Haeri Yazdi, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, and Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi 'Amoli. The very title of the five-volume book, *Usul-i Falsafeh wa Rawesh-i Realism* [The Principles of Philosophy and the Methodology of Realism] (1953-58), that marks the start of this era indicates this increasing epistemological preoccupation. Authored by Allamah Tabatabaei, this book was the first philosophical challenge to Marxism. It included Ayatullah Mutahhari's extensive commentaries, which not only capably fulfilled the translation task but also effectively expanded Allamah Tabatabaei's insights.

The first six essays in the collection of fourteen essays explored epistemological themes and bore such titles as What is Philosophy?, Realism and Idealism, and Knowledge and Perception. These essays refuted sensationalism and empiricism while building up a rationalist epistemology supportive of metaphysics. This epistemology, which embraced the methodological primacy of reason to faith, was in good company with modernity. However, beyond that the authors disagreed. The remaining essays were ontological in subject, belonging to theology in both the general sense and the specific sense. As time passed, epistemology increasingly received attention, but unlike in the West, ontology remained highly valued.

Understanding Shari'ah

While the epistemological reaction to modernity was still unfolding, another frontier in the encounter with modernity emerged in the 1960s. What was at stake here was not the doctrinal dimension of Islam but its social, practical motif. Islam as an utter and comprehensive submission to Allah draws no distinction between the sacred and the secular; that is, in Islam the sacred permeates the secular. It is against the background of this non-distinction principle that Shari'ah, the Islamic law, should be understood. Shari'ah is the body of codes prescribed by Allah to shape Muslims' life, both individually and socially, to conform to the divine will. Given the imperialistic tendency of modernity, the non-distinction principle of Islam and its embodiment, Shari'ah, has been a source of tension between Islam and modernity all over the Islamic world. Iran has been no exception.

In early 60's, the rouhaniyyun (the traditionalists) came to realize that a merely negating attitude to Western approaches in such categories as politics, economy, and law was far from adequate to validate the superiority of Islam. To show this superiority they needed to spell out alternative Islamic approaches in these categories and demonstrate their capabilities. A shift in how clerics envisioned the political future of the country added to the urgency of this need. In the early sixties, the rouhaniyyun came to believe that there was no realistic hope of saving the Muslim country and Islam while the Shah was in power. They were now convinced that a regime change was inevitable. But they could not afford repeating the experience of the "Constitutional Revolution" by focusing exclusively on overthrowing the regime without developing an Islamic alternative. Therefore, they felt obligated to articulate Islamic views on politics, economy, the judiciary, and so on.

Traditionally, it was *fiqh* (jurisprudence) that dealt with understanding Shari'ah. Hence it was naturally expected that fiqh would take on the responsibility of developing the Islamic alternative. However, this was the first time that Shi'ah Fiqh faced this concern. Hitherto, Shi'ah Fuqaha (jurists) had not been involved in government; thus, understandably enough, they had not investigated the Shari'ah's social aspects. Accordingly, the fiqh worked out by them did not meet the new demand. It was imperative to reread the scriptures in view of the present circumstances in Iran and the modern world to find answers to new problems. This can be seen as the beginning of a hermeneutical phase in Iranian religious thought.

Hermeneutical Reason

Endemic to this phase was an over-riding hermeneutical question. The ever-changing nature of individual and social life poses to any concept of implementing Shari'ah the question of how, and with what mechanism, a system of eternal law can keep pace with ever-altering time. As a matter of fact, such a mechanism was already implanted in Shi'ism: *ijtihad*. Ijtihad is the delicate art of continuous reading of the scriptures to discover the religious obligation of people here and now so that neither the principles of Shari'ah nor the changing reality of human life are ignored. This concept presupposes some sense or degree of changeability in Shari'ah; otherwise it would be impossible for Shari'ah to catch up with the flux of time. On the other hand, belief in the eternality of Islam presupposes stability. Many had no problem ascribing both stability and changeability to Shari'ah; however, the most demanding question of this hermeneutical phase was where to draw the line between what was stable/stationary and what was changeable.

Ijtihad, as defined, is unique to Shi'ism, as opposed to Sunnism, and has been practiced by Shi'ahs at least since the twelfth Shi'ah Imam went into the occultation. But, for the reason mentioned above, ijtihad had concerned itself primarily with the individual codes of Shari'ah. In the wake of the new changes, the rouhaniyyun set about applying ijtihad with its full capacity to such subjects as politics, economy, the judiciary, human rights, and the rights of women. Needless to say, the application of ijtihad to the areas more or less untouched by the previous fuqaha amounted to making innovations in ijtihad itself and its techniques. Ayatoolah Muttahari and other clerics were quick to turn to the concept of 'aql (reason/intellect), to which ijtihad owed all its power.

Intrinsic to ijtihad is a concept of reason that could be called "hermeneutical reason." Ijtihad as defined above necessitates studious exertion on the part of a mujtahed (the scholar who exercises ijtihad) to comprehend divine legislative will in the current state of affairs. This capacity of going beyond words and comprehending their signification for us here and now, the capacity to read and reread the text in view of changing circumstances, is what I label as hermeneutical reason. Therefore, this "reason" is responsible for drawing the line between the stationary and variable/changeable, and for determining the contemporary application of Shari'ah. This concept of reason attracted attention from the heroes of the hermeneutical phase, particularly Ayatollah Mutahhari. Depending on this concept, the rouhaniyyun embarked on authoring books and articles on such topics as the Islamic economy, women's rights in Islam, human rights in Islam, and the like. One of the most influential books in this context was *Hukumat'i Islami* [Islamic Government] written by Ayatullah Khomeini in 1972. The book outlined the theory of Islamic government that would be realized eight years later as the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The hermeneutical aspect of Iranian religious discourse gained great momentum with an unprecedented turn to Islam by some prominent roushanfikrs in the 1960s. Until then, they had sought cures for their nation's sufferings in Western schools of thought. Witnessing all the ramifications that Western involvement, particularly that of Britain and the U.S., had caused in the last forty years resulted in most roushanfikrs becoming deeply disillusioned with the West. They came to believe that any solution for Iran's chronic problems should be sought in their own cultural resources. Thus they began to reflect seriously on Iranian identity to see who they, as Iranians, were. Regarding the West as the *other* helped them shape their Iranian *self*. Now being Iranian meant *not* being a Westerner, but what being Iranian positively signified had yet to be determined. Many roushanfikrs turned to Islam as the main element of Iranian identity.

The first step in this direction was taken by Jalal-e 'Al-e Ahmad (1923-69), who wrote *Gharbzadegi* (The Westoxication, 1962), a very influential book in resolving the identity crisis in which the roushanfikrs were entangled. 'Al-e Ahmad, a prominent roushanfikr who had membership in the Tudeh party on his record, here criticized the Iranian roushanfikrs for "westoxication," which means being pathetically preoccupied by the West. He regarded obsessive preoccupation with the West as a disease that could be cured only by a return to the self. This self, in his view, was an eastern-Islamic one. Therefore, he invited his fellow roushanfikrs to offer their hand of friendship toward the clerics as embodiments of the values and thoughts essential to the Iranian identity. Likewise, he invited the clerics to read the signs of the times more carefully in order to apprehend the new cultural and intellectual demands before it was too late.

The emergence of a new class of roushanfikrs known as "religious roushanfikrs" in the '60s indicates how successful 'Al-e Ahmad's work was. Thanks to it many roushanfikrs broke the spell of the West and thus started thinking of a self of their own. Moreover, he effectively drew their attention to Islam as their authentic self. It was no surprise that he barely went beyond this to explain what that Islamic self really was, for he saw it as the rouhaniyyun's responsibility, not his, to articulate that self. Later on, there emerged some religious roushanfikrs who were not pleased with this division of labor. Among them was 'Ali Shari'ati (1933-78).

Shari'ati took over the unfinished project of 'Al-e Ahmad and set about providing his own idea of the Islamic self. Shari'ati, like almost all other religious roushanfikrs, had no official religious education, and obtained his knowledge of Islam through personal studies. He graduated from the University of Paris in hagiography. However, it was not his studies there but his enthusiastic reading of some renowned Western thinkers that contributed substantially to his later career as a revolutionary and reformist figure. Shari'ati read Hegel, Marx, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, George Gorwich (1894-1965, a new-Marxist sociologist), Franz Fanon, Levi Masinnon (1888-1962), Ramon Aron (1905-84), and others while in France. In the meantime, he came into contact with the Algerian Liberation Front that fought France.

Intensely preoccupied by the need for a radical change in Iran's political system, Shari'ati put forward a highly revolutionary and political reading of Islam in which the influence of all the thinkers mentioned above can be easily distinguished. This was exactly what agitated the rouhaniyyun, even those who favored him in the beginning, against Shari'ati's work. It also caused some tense debates between rouhaniyyun on the one hand and Shari'ati and his followers on the other. The traditionalist rouhaniyyun saw Shari'ati's work as reflecting the thoughts of the Western thinkers, rather than Islam as represented in the scriptures.

The divergence, even antagonism, between the rouhaniyyun and religious roushanfikrs in their understanding of Islam can partly be explained by the differences in their education and educational environments. Even more influential was the main goal each was striving to reach here. The roushanfikrs were always obsessed with Iran's backwardness and the remedy for it. Up until the '60s they had placed their hope in the West, and only after disenchantment with it did they turn to Islam to form a national identity. Besides, Islam provided them with a rich source of inspiration for resistance and revolution in the face of imperialism and the Shah's regime. Therefore, a nativist or nationalistic agenda was working behind their appeal to Islam. This instrumentalist approach to Islam could barely be found among the rouhaniyyun, who looked at their enterprise as an intellectual *jihad* to protect Islam and the Islamic country against the West's severe threat. This difference in goals, in my view, generated different natures for their work. Thus, while the rouhaniyyun were looking for answers to contemporary questions in the scriptures, the roushanfikrs were actually constructing the answers by reference to the same texts and by adopting what could be of help from the Western thinkers.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1980 further intensified this hermeneutical debate. Until then the religious thinkers had produced a sizable body of literature to the effect that Islam could provide effective plans for both the social and individual aspects of life. Now they were in a position to show the veracity of that claim in practice, but they faced a host of problems. For example, what exactly is the economic system approved by Islam? Is it more like a capitalist system or a communist one, or something totally different from both? Is the government allowed to decide what the relationship between an employer and an employee should be, or is that to be left completely to the mutual agreement of the two? Is it permissible for the government to collect tax beyond what is stipulated in the religious sources? A brief discussion of the tax question may be illuminating.

The Tax Question

According to the Qur'an, Muslims should pay two kinds of religious taxes, zakah (almsgiving) and Khums (one fifth). The tradition specifies as taxable items like wheat, barley, dates, gold, silver, sheep, the surplus of the yearly income, and so on. Before the establishment of the government, this item of law was not subject to debate, but after that it aroused a big controversy. Obviously the amount levied from these items does not adequately provide for the needs of a government. On the other hand, private ownership has been recognized and respected by Shari'ah. This means that unless Shari'ah itself has given permission, it is forbidden to take possession of people's property. The conclusion would be that the government is not allowed to levy tax from properties other than those specifically itemized in the scriptures.

Dilemmas like this intensified the core issue of the hermeneutical phase, namely how to hold both the stability of Shari'ah and its flexibility. Some came to believe that the root of the problem lay not in Shari'ah but in the traditional fiqh that was, in their view, too rigid and static to adequately reflect the flexible, dynamic nature of Shari'ah and was thus unable to meet the demands of the time. To give more flexibility to fiqh they turned to what I referred to as "hermeneutical reason." An outline of how some scholars treated the taxation issue throws light on the debate and on hermeneutical reason. (Solutions could be and have been found in ways other than those discussed here. This is not the only or necessarily the correct solution.)

The scholars maintained that the difficulty as to the taxation system came from a literalistic approach to the text which was foreign to ijtihad. Literalism suffered some deplorable failures. First, it failed to read the text in its historical context. Secondly, it did not fully grasp the social character of the religious taxes, since it could not understand the social character of Shari'ah as a whole. It looked at Shari'ah as a set of injunctions with only personal spiritual significance. The literalistic approach to the scriptures missed the point that these taxes were to form a system aimed at fulfilling the financial needs of the Muslim society and government. The only reason that those specific items had been named as taxable properties was that they were the common capital of people in the early history of Islam in the Peninsula. Therefore, there is no credibility to a literalistic reading that restricts what is taxable to the properties itemized in the scriptures.

Theoretical Contraction and Expansion

The inevitability of an all-encompassing flexibility and change, not only in Shari'ah but in Islam as a whole, was the thrust of a series of articles entitled "The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of Shari'ah" published in a magazine consecutively since April 1988. But the flexibility these articles were advocating went far beyond what exponents of the dynamic fiqh were promoting. The author, Hasan Haj Faraj Dabbaq, known as 'Abdukarim Soroush, graduated from the University of Tehran as a pharmacist and had studied philosophy of science at the University of London. He maintained in the articles that the debate between traditional fiqh and dynamic fiqh would be futile if the issue was not tackled at a more fundamental hermeneutical level. First one has to find out why and how religious people's understanding of their scriptures changes and differs. This question was Soroush's point of departure in the theory of theoretical contraction and expansion.

The theory first makes a Kantian distinction between the religion in itself, which Soroush defines as the scripture (the meaning of which we have no direct access to) and our understanding of religion, which is all we have at our disposal. The former is eternally stable but the latter is constantly changing. Soroush maintains that all areas of knowledge, with the exception of religious knowledge, are symmetrically related to each other so that change anywhere in any of these areas causes changes in all other areas. Religious knowledge, however, needs other disciplines as the consumer of their products. This is so because the religious texts, as the source of religious knowledge, are totally silent and can be only made to speak by the reader who brings to the texts his or her whole body of knowledge. Therefore, it is the reader's knowledge of other sciences that, in the final analysis, makes the text speak and consequently generates his or her religious knowledge. In this way, any change in human knowledge translates inevitably into a change in religious knowledge. Hence, given the incessant change in the former, the latter incessantly changes. Accordingly, Soroush recommends that clerics and all other religious thinkers refresh their knowledge of other subjects than religion in order for their religious knowledge to be refreshed.

Soroush actually erased the problem rather than solve it. He gets rid of one horn of the hermeneutical dilemma, namely "stability," and then puts religion, or the understanding of religion, at the mercy of the ever-changing sciences. Quite predictably, the extremely reductionistic nature of this theory could not go unnoticed by the religious thinkers, both rouhaniyyun and roushanfikrs, who were not ready to see Islamic thought and theology as simply a consumer of secular sciences. The dispute over Suroush's theory dominated religious discourse for years after its publication.

The theory of "theoretical contraction and expansion" must nevertheless be given credit for evolving hermeneutical discourse in Iran to a philosophical level. It was the first systematic attempt to explain the mechanism of understanding the religious texts. However, something about the theory is even more relevant to the subject at hand. One might say that it betrays a confusion between hermeneutics and epistemology, leading to a fallacious combination of them. It is not difficult to see how the theory has drawn results of a hermeneutical character from premises of an epistemological character. This unveils the degree to which both epistemology and hermeneutics are, not necessarily fallaciously in all cases, intertwined in the current religious discourse of Iran. The future of religious discourse, in my view, hinges on the future of these two sub-discourses, epistemology and hermeneutics.

Note

[1] Henceforth, for the purpose of brevity the term "Shi'ite" will be used, but it is only indicating Shiite response from within the Iranian religious establishment.

The Limits of Modernity

Phil Enns

> *Hence, naming God, before being an act of which I am capable, is what the texts of my predilection do when they escape from their authors, their redactional setting, and their first audience, when they deploy their world, when they poetically manifest and thereby reveal a world we might inhabit.*[1]

If one wanted to compile a list of the characteristics of modernity, certainly rejection of the possibility of a poetically manifested religious world would be an obvious choice. This is not to deny that there are still ways of being religious within modernity, but to acknowledge that modernity rules out the possibility of dwelling within a religious world. This distinction between participating in particular religious activities and dwelling within a religious world is crucial for modernity. While the latter presupposes the extension of religious meaning beyond particular religious activities, the former can function in relative isolation. In modernity, the religious is understood as a private affair that concerns only the individual herself. The public sphere, therefore, not only rejects the introduction of religious reasoning into its discourse but also requires its participants to inhabit a world that is fundamentally non-religious. While the individual might have religious motivations for public actions, these public actions must be understood — that is, justified — according to non-religious criteria.

This rejection of religion as having no public significance has not come without a cost. What was lost to modernity with this rejection was the ability to provide understanding with regard to the relationship between knowledge and the world. In particular, two questions, ‘What is the world?’ and ‘What should we do in the world?’, have traditionally prompted religious responses and therefore remain problematic within modern discourse. Of course, there never was a time[2] when these questions had answers that satisfied everyone, but what is unique about modernity is that the very possibility of answering such questions is in doubt. Even the questions themselves can produce

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objections of being ‘too metaphysical’, ‘incoherent’ or ‘useless’. In light of this, it seems fair to wonder whether religion provides something essential for human understanding.

Ockham and Hume: The Roots of Modernity

The roots of modernity can be found in, first, the nominalism of Ockham and, second, the empiricism of Hume. With Ockham the concept of a thing is merely a sign of that thing.

> [E]very universal is an intention of the mind which, on the most probable account, is identical with the act of understanding. Thus, it is said that the act of understanding by which I grasp men is a natural sign of men in the same way that weeping is a natural sign of grief. It is a natural sign such that it can stand for men in mental propositions in the same way that a spoken word can stand for things in spoken propositions.[3]

That a concept is merely a sign of something else represents a significant shift from classical thought in which the idea, through analogy or reflection, participated in the essence of the thing. Through participation, the thing was immediately present to the mind and thereby allowed for knowledge. While Ockham does not entirely do away with the idea of participation, that the concept is to be understood now as only a sign of the thing represents a distancing of the understanding from the thing to be understood. This has significant implications for religion, where the thing to be understood has no immediate physical presence.

> . . . the proposition ‘God is three and one’ is not known per se to a wayfarer [i.e., a person on earth on their way to heaven] and is not deducible from propositions that *are* known per se to a wayfarer. Nevertheless, one who is happy in heaven and sees God can infer the proposition that *we* formulate from a second proposition that *he* formulates, a proposition that is known per se to him . . .[4]

In heaven, the believer could immediately arrive at the concept of the Trinity because the Trinity would be an object to her. However, for the believer on earth, the Trinity is not an object of perception, nor can it be arrived at through reason. This leaves only revelation, which is always removed from the thing being revealed. Therefore, religious knowledge must be distinguished from other sorts of knowledge.

If Ockham introduced an epistemological distance between the knower and the thing to be known, Hume turned this distance into a chasm. According to Hume, all that we can know about a thing is what our senses provide us.

> Every idea is copied from some preceding impression or sentiment; and where we cannot find any impression, we may be certain that there is no idea. . . . But when many uniform instances appear, and the same object is always followed by the same event; we then begin to entertain the notion of cause and connexion.[5]

Unlike Ockham, who posited a natural relation between the signs in the mind and things outside it, Hume roots all ideas in sense impression. All that the mind has for raw material are sense impressions, and it is from them that ideas are produced. Furthermore, these sense impressions do not come with ready-made associations but are given associations by the mind. For example, sense impressions of snow and coldness are associated with each other in the mind by virtue of repeatedly following each other. Therefore, the object presents itself only as an occasion for the sense impression but does not provide any content for the sign that the mind will hold for that object. If the mind perceives a pattern within the sense impressions provided to it, a habit will be formed which will be taken to represent a kind of understanding.

When Hume takes up the matter of religion, he indicates that the limits of our experience will not allow for religious knowledge. “Our experience, so imperfect in itself and so limited both in extent and duration, can afford us no probable conjecture concerning the whole of things.”[6] If our experience is composed solely of sense impressions, any talk of things that lie beyond sense impressions is entirely speculative and cannot count as knowledge.

> But supposing, which is the real case with regard to man, that this creature is not antecedently convinced of a supreme intelligence, benevolent, and powerful, but is left to gather such a belief from the appearances of things; this entirely alters the case, nor will he ever find any reason for such a conclusion. He may be fully convinced of the narrow limits of his understanding, but this will not help him in forming an inference concerning the goodness of superior powers, since he must form that inference from what he knows, not from what he is ignorant of.[7]

Hume's argument boils down to the claim that because experience cannot provide evidence of God, we are not justified in believing that there is a God. While there had been previous criticisms of arguments for the existence of God, what distinguishes this one is how it limits the discussion by making clear the limits of understanding. Since all knowledge is derived from the senses, and God is not an object for the senses, there can be no knowledge of God. The criterion for what is to constitute knowledge, and in particular religious knowledge, becomes the evidence provided by the senses.

The combination of Ockham's nominalism and Hume's empiricism set the stage for modernity. With nominalism, the metaphysical world of classical thought was discarded in favor of a world where knowledge was composed of signs. With empiricism, knowledge is limited by what is perceived through the senses. It was Kant, however, who integrated nominalism and empiricism into a system, and who thereby marks the beginning of modernity.

Kant: The Limits of Knowledge

Kant famously describes how Hume awoke him from his dogmatic sleep by challenging the possibility of conceptual knowledge. What he saw in Hume was a challenge to the scientific project which was just beginning to produce spectacular results. If all we can know about the world are the associations the mind makes of sense impressions, then how can we be certain about the fundamental laws, such as causality, which underlie the scientific project? For example, if the belief that the one billiard ball caused the other ball to move is only a product of an habitual association of the mind, then I can have no certainty that the next time I play billiards, I will experience the same results. After all, the law of causality is a habit of my mind and not a law of nature. It was this skepticism concerning how our understanding relates to the world that Kant aimed to overcome.

Kant begins from the same starting point as Hume: all knowledge relies on sense perceptions. While the senses take in all kinds of data, what Kant calls "the manifold," we never perceive this manifold but rather we perceive images. These images are the results of the productive imagination which organizes the manifold according to concepts. So, when I look at a pen, I do not perceive a jumble of shapes and colors, but an organized picture. Furthermore, this organization is not just the sense data ordered, like a photograph, but also includes recognition and understanding. I do not perceive merely orderly sense data but a pen. My recognition of the pen is therefore the combination of sense data and the concept of the pen, so that the data is ordered under the concept 'pen' through the imagination.

Up to this point, Kant largely follows Hume. He differs from Hume by noting that while the recognition of objects is the result of imagination, this recognition takes place within a unity of perception which makes understanding possible. Understanding is not just recognizing discrete objects, like a pen here and paper there, but rather putting these images together so that we understand the pen as something used to write on the paper. This understanding, that is the quality of a unity of perception, is not an accidental association but necessary or objective. Understanding requires not only the products of imagination but also their relationship to each other.

> But now if this unity of association did not also have an objective ground, so that it would be impossible for appearances to be apprehended by the imagination otherwise than under the conditions of a possible synthetic unity of this apprehension, then it would also be entirely contingent whether appearances fit into a connection of human cognitions. . . . There must therefore be an objective ground, i.e. one that can be understood *a priori* to all empirical laws of the imagination, on which rests the possibility, indeed even the necessity of a law extending through all appearances, a law, namely for regarding them throughout as data of sense that are associable in themselves and subject to universal laws of a thoroughgoing connection in reproduction.[8]

Here, Kant attempts to overcome Hume's skepticism and to provide a secure foundation for knowledge. For understanding on the part of the individual, there must be a necessary connection between the appearances within consciousness. Without this connection, consciousness would be a chaotic jumble of images. However, the pen remains on my desk and continues to be available for me to write with on the paper. Billiard balls react to each other in predictable ways. Since there is this necessary unity within consciousness, there must be an objective source for it. This objective source cannot be solely the subject itself, since the images are based on sense perception. Therefore, this source must also lie outside of the individual. In this manner, Kant can both assert the importance of the empirical and justify conceptual knowledge. Knowledge is based on sense perceptions but is ordered according to structures that exist objectively.[9]

When it comes to matters of religion, like the existence of God, Kant draws much the same conclusion as Hume, that experience does not provide us with any evidence. Kant allows that the concept of God has a place in understanding, but only if this concept is taken *as if* God existed.

> Thus whatever and however much our concept of an object may contain, we have to go out beyond it in order to provide it with existence. With objects of sense this happens through the connection with some perception of mine in accordance with empirical laws; but for objects of pure thinking [e.g., God] there is no means whatever for cognizing their existence, because it would have to be cognized entirely *a priori*, but our consciousness of all existence (whether immediately through perception or through inferences connecting something with perception) belongs entirely and without exception to the unity of experience, and though an existence outside this field cannot be declared absolutely impossible, it is a presupposition that we cannot justify through anything.[10]

Here we have the combination of nominalism and empiricism. Since a concept is a sign of a thing and the criterion for the existence of a thing is its empirical content, objects of pure thinking, of which Kant takes God as an example, cannot be understood as existing. This does not mean that we cannot still hold the concept of God in our thinking, but that it cannot function as a sign which points to something. For Kant, ideas like God act as regulatory principles, helping to organize our thinking but not providing any cognitive content. Why does God play such an important role in Kant's thought, given that it is a concept devoid of cognitive content? Why does Kant bother with God at all?

God and the World

As we saw above, Kant stresses the unity of perception. We do not perceive the world as a jumble of discrete objects but rather as a coherent unity that has an objective ground. This objective ground is crucial because it allows Kant to connect human understanding with the world. He suggests that we think of this ground along the lines of a highest reality or an original being.

> Now if we pursue this idea of ours so far as to hypostatize it, then we will be able to determine the original being through the mere concept of the highest reality as a being that is singular, simple, all-sufficient, eternal, etc., in a word, we will be able to determine it in its unconditioned completeness through all predications. The concept of such a being is that of **God** thought of in a transcendental sense . . .[11]

The concept of God therefore fits what we would expect of the highest reality if we were to imagine it having an image. Kant immediately emphasizes that the concept of God, here, is to be understood as a fiction whose only role is to help us imagine how there could be a unity of perception. The concept 'God' is to be taken as a regulatory principle.

> The ideal of the highest being is, according to these considerations, nothing other than a regulative principle of reason, to regard all combination in the world as if it arose from an all-sufficient necessary cause, so as to ground on that cause the rule of a unity that is systematic and necessary according to universal laws; but it is not an assertion of an existence that is necessary in itself.[12]

God is, then, an imagined construct that is useful for explaining how the world works but is not itself real. God has the character of an '*as if*', that is, an analogical model.

Yet, if God is a fictional construct used only to explain how the world might have a unified ground, is God therefore also a contingent concept? For example, given Kant's description of the world, one might think of it as if it were a machine. This image is helpful for making sense of Kant's account, but it is not necessary. One could just as easily not bother with any image, though understanding might be more difficult. Yet, for Kant, the concept of God *must* be included in understanding the world.

> But in this way [i.e., the original ground of the world is to be considered only in regards to its use and not what it is in itself] can we nevertheless assume a unique wise and all-powerful world author? Without any doubt; and not only that, but we must presuppose such a being.[13]

Such a being is posited only through analogy and not in substance, so that there has to be something which is as if it were God. But why *must* such a being be presupposed? Unlike the image of the world as machine, the concept of 'God' is necessary for reason to make sense of how we can know the world. If Kant's account of the world requires the conceptual structure inherent to the idea of 'God', then we cannot be satisfied with his dismissal of the concept of 'God' as fiction and merely a regulative principle. Kant provides an answer to the question 'What is the world?' that both fictionalizes God and requires God as a structural component. This odd predicament is the result of Kant's requiring, on the one hand, a unity of experience while, on the other, being unable to ascribe any particular description of this unity with cognitive content.

God and Morality

Given Kant's account of knowledge governed by the criterion of sense experience, morality would seem to pose a problem, because morality is not guided by sense experience but requires general laws or rules to govern the will. This means that neither happiness nor pleasure can serve as a guide for morality.

> But practical precepts [i.e., rules meant to govern the will] based on [subjective experiences] can never be universal because the determining ground of the faculty of desire is based on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, which can never be assumed to be universally directed to the same objects.[14]

If morality depends on laws that apply universally, then these laws cannot be derived from subjective experiences like pleasure or happiness. Instead, practical principles can only be produced by removing anything that is related to the senses, leaving only the form of lawgiving.

But how does one apply the form of lawgiving? Here Kant turns again to the imagination. With regard to objects of nature, the imagination places sense data under a concept. With the moral law, there is no sense data, but the imagination can take the form of lawgiving, put it under an idea of reason, and produce a law that can be applied in concrete situations. The moral rule, having only the form of lawgiving, is therefore formulated by Kant as follows:

> Ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of the nature of which you were yourself a part, you could indeed regard it as possible through your will.[15]

According to Kant, this rule is nothing more than what people do all the time when they wonder what the world would be like if everyone acted in a particular manner. What if everyone lied? or cheated? or killed? The moral key to this exercise is not the particular action but the exercise of formalizing it.

That morality has only the form of lawgiving brings with it two benefits. First, it allows for universal application. Second, and most significant for my argument, because morality is not constrained by material conditions, a will governed by morality can alone be considered a free will. Kant does not first posit freedom and then the moral will (i.e., because we are free, we can be moral) but posits first the moral will and then freedom (i.e., because we are moral, we are free). Freedom is a pure idea, lacking any determination from the senses, and therefore cannot be the condition for morality. But, for Kant, morality is pressed on to us by reason.

> We can become aware of pure practical laws just as we are aware of pure theoretical principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them to us and to the setting aside of all empirical conditions to which reason directs us.[16]

We therefore talk about the moral law which, through reason, commands individuals to act as if they were acting under a duty. Furthermore, this moral law sets aside the necessity found under empirical conditions. Just as there is an empirical necessity which requires objects in the world to act accordingly, so also the moral law requires human beings to act morally.

Yet, how the moral law acts on human beings must be distinguished from the necessity at work in the world. How can we be assured that acting according to the moral law will have a positive outcome in the world? Kant makes it clear that we cannot identify morality with happiness in the world, yet happiness has to be taken as an outcome of following the moral law. Here we recall the problem he faced with regard to the connection between the unity of perception and the world. That is, how can we reconcile human activity and the world? Here, the question is, how can obedience to the moral law take concrete shape in a world which is itself determined by a different set of laws?

If there is no necessary connection between morality and happiness in the world, we must necessarily postulate such a connection.

> Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also *postulated*. However, this supreme cause is to contain the ground of the correspondence of nature not merely with a law of the will of rational beings but with the representation of this *law,* so far as they make it the *supreme determining ground of the will,* and consequently not merely with morals in their form but also with their morality as their determining ground, that is, with their moral disposition. . . . Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being that is the cause of nature by *understanding* and *will* (hence its author), that is, *God*.[17]

In order to maintain a connection between moral activity and the world, there must be a cause that grounds both nature and the moral law. This supreme cause must also represent the moral law and so must also possess intelligence and will. It is God, therefore, who fits the bill as the supreme lawgiver.

While Kant contends that in referring to God he is talking about a rational belief, there are good reasons for questioning this usage. Kant must assume that there is a correspondence between our moral activity and the world, and that this correspondence is guaranteed by God, yet he is unable to ascribe to this description any cognitive content. In other words, we have to believe in something that looks like God but we can't take this belief to be true.

Modernity and God

It did not take long for philosophers to take the next step in this development of modernity and reject God even as a postulate. After all, if we are concerned with the pursuit of truth, we can't hold onto religious claims that lack cognitive content. For modernity, the nails in the coffin containing the belief in God were hammered into place by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. This rejection of God, however, merely exacerbated the problem Kant recognized: If, as moderns, we are going to be nominalists and empiricists, how can we be assured that what we think we know is in fact the case?

While this problem has been addressed in numerous ways, ranging from the Logical Positivists' quest for certainty to the deconstruction of the problem by late moderns like Richard Rorty, I will mention two contemporary thinkers who recognize the problem Kant saw in modernity and provide curiously similar responses.

Marcel Gauchet describes what he calls the 'residue of religion'.[18] For him, religion's primary residue is the partitioning of reality into the particular and the unified.

> Reality as it appears to us, as an inexhaustible multiplicity of sensible qualities, an infinite network of distinct objects and concrete differences, involves another reality: the one that suddenly appears before the mind when we go beyond the visible to examine its nondifferentiated unity and continuity.[19]

In itself, this apprehension of a reality split between particulars and unity does not require any religious commitment but is constitutive of religion. Science is a good example of this split in that it pursues, to ever greater depths, what particular things are made of while largely dismissing any attempt to explain what unifies them. Yet, science is fundamentally committed to the idea that there is a unity to nature which allows for universal laws.

> If on the one hand science expels the invisible from the visible (occult causal agencies), on the other hand it accommodates the invisible in the visible in a profoundly original manner, by installing an invisible certainty about its order at the very heart of the world, more certain than the world's appearances. We are dealing here with a displacement and application of the formative division to the physical reality of things, where the categories of the non-differentiated (reduction to unity, continuity of being, the essential shared nature of phenomena, etc.) play the role of regulative ideas, in the Kantian sense, at once unattainable, structuring and motivating.[20]

There is an internal contradiction working within science when it presupposes a unified ground for the world yet rejects any attempt to describe this ground. Like Kant, Gauchet acknowledges the important role the religious plays for our understanding the unity of the world but rejects the possibility that the religious might be true. Religion was an historical phenomenon that allowed human beings to develop without having to face directly life's troubling existential questions. As moderns, however, we have reached the point where religion is no longer needed. Yet, having reached this level of maturity, we have no obvious answers to basic questions such as how everything can fit together. Gauchet is left in the awkward position of acknowledging the key role the religious had and does play in our understanding of the world, while simultaneously arguing that we need to leave it behind.

James Edwards tells us that religion has finally been revealed for what it really is, namely a particular set of values dressed up in authoritative metaphysical language. Like Gauchet, Edwards recommends the rejection of religion for personal responsibility, yet wants to keep something of the religious. He sees two dangers to the loss of religion: the loss of a sense of limits to what human beings should or can do; and the loss of a sense of *Pathos* (i.e., depth, profundity) to human life. Religion was able

> to combine, on the one hand, a sense that human will — the will to the will's own splendor — is limited by something greater, by something to which it must finally answer, with, on the other hand, a call away from the ordinary pieties of "the world" toward a life that is deeper and truer and richer.[21]

Edwards proposes that the poetic can, in the absence of religion, accomplish the same task, giving the example of Thoreau. Writers like Thoreau compose their work under the duty and responsibility of truthfulness so that it must "come with the force of a revelation."[22] So, while rejecting religion, Edwards wants to insist that the work of poets is still religious. But why?

According to Edwards, three structural features of the religious are found in the poetic. First, there is a duality within the universe described variously as eternal/temporal, true/illusion, etc. Second, this duality is not one of equals but hierarchical, so that one half of the dualism is to be privileged. Third, this hierarchical relationship has been disrupted so that "the proper order of things must continually be reacknowledged and restored in practice."[23] Edwards summarizes these features as the demand for truthfulness in our lives, and claims that this demand can be found in the poetic. The poetic functions as a kind of religious practice without being burdened by the metaphysical errors of religion.

Here we find the same predicament that we found in Kant. Edwards recognizes that the religious provides a powerful means of living in the world, but he wants to reject the possibility that the religious can give an account of the world. He, therefore, attempts to reject religion as the 'imaginative' aspect of the religious, replacing it with something else, the poetic. But the problem remains. Edwards wants the poet to be under the imperative 'Be truthful' without being committed to a specific idea of truthfulness. This leaves Edwards in a bind: According to what criterion can he discern that poets like Thoreau are 'getting it right'? Certainly poets like Thoreau may want to express themselves truthfully, and people like Edwards might be impressed with this expression, but as Edwards himself notes, "the point is not one's various satisfactions, which may or may not come; the point is to *get it right*."[24] Edwards is stuck in the same dilemma as Kant, recognizing that God had served to assure the proper ordering of things in the world, while at the same time unable to hold a belief in God.

Responding to Modernity

Religion, and specifically God, has played a crucial role in thinking about the world, but modernity has cut itself off from this possibility. With the confluence of nominalism and empiricism, as determined by Kant, modernity was robbed of the possibility of thinking about the totality of knowledge and understanding. In this sense, the reduction of God to a trope is symptomatic of a fundamental problem within modernity.

At its most basic level, this problem arises within modernity through its positing empirical data as the ground for knowledge while holding that knowledge names things in the world. This is problematic insofar as what the empirical provides is sense data, while the ideas constituting our knowledge arise from the organization of sense data. There will always be, then, an asymmetrical relationship between how we know and what we know. Kant tried to resolve this dilemma by resorting to a mechanism, the productive imagination, which organized sense data and ideas. However, the problem cannot be solved by referring to a mechanism, because the problem then attaches itself to the mechanism, so that the question now becomes how this mechanism is able to get it right. Since this can go on ad infinitum, Kant stops it by referring to God, and specifically the medieval God, who is uncaused and therefore the ultimate cause. Those who followed Kant have for the most part rejected this turn to God and either, like Gauchet, taken the problem to be insoluble or, like Edwards, attempted to find a more palatable substitute for God.

In giving an historical account of the problem of knowledge in modernity, I have tried to raise the possibility that we are not fated to live with this problem. By focusing on God and religion, I have also tried to suggest there is a genuine alternative. I am not arguing that religion itself is the solution, though it might be, but rather that in religion we find a set of practices and beliefs which has traditionally provided answers to the kinds of questions that modernity has found problematic. Kant, Gauchet, and Edwards say as much when they acknowledge that religion possesses beliefs and practices which address their own concerns. The difficulty lies in these thinkers being unable to consider these beliefs and practices as possible.

There is, however, something paradoxical about a situation where one has an answer to a question, yet rejects it because one holds that in principle there cannot be an answer. It isn't that the questions themselves are poorly formed, but that whatever possible answers one can produce cannot be taken as true. Nor is it that the answers do not follow from the questions, since Kant, Gauchet, and Edwards acknowledge that religion has been a sufficient response. The problem seems to lie in modernity's requiring an answer that can never be satisfactory. Put differently, the combination of nominalism and empiricism, as specifically articulated by Kant, leads inevitably to skepticism.

It would be naive to think that by simply articulating the dilemma of modernity we can escape its grasp. Modernity has made us moderns — that is, those of us who identify with the West — what we are today: a people deeply committed to the ideals of liberal democracy and the inevitable progress of science. Yet, as I have shown above, these ideals cannot be coherently thought within the limits of modernity itself. Furthermore, religion, which remains fundamentally alien to modern sensibilities, continues to offer us, in Ricoeur's words, 'a world we might inhabit.' By entering into this religious world, we need not necessarily reject modernity. The religious world is implicitly assumed by modernity, as I have sought to show. Instead, to inhabit that world is to reject modernity's self-imposed limits on knowledge and to accept that there are ways of living in the world which address our deepest questions about the world. Living a religious life is, then, ultimately an acknowledgement that there are answers and that these answers matter in the world.

Notes

[1] Paul Ricoeur, “Naming God,” in *Figuring the Sacred*, ed. Mark Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 223.

[2] A difficulty in discussing modernity lies in how one ought to understand it. While it is clearly an historical phenomenon, there are large parts of the world today which have not come under the sway of modernity. I treat modernity as an epoch which is both historically and culturally specific.

[3] William Ockham, *Ockham’s Theory of Terms, Part I of the Summa Logicae*, trans. Michael Loux (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 81.

[4] William Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, transl. Alfred Freddoso and Francis Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 2nd Quodlibet, Q.3.

[5] David Hume, “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1977), 738.

[6] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 45.

[7] *Ibid.*, 68.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), A121-22.

[9] It is important to note Kant’s distinction between the productive and the reproductive imagination. What I have been discussing here is the productive imagination, which is a necessary condition for understanding and has an objective ground. The reproductive imagination, on the other hand, associates various experiences and therefore has no objective ground. With the productive imagination, we have the experience of a horse. Through the reproductive imagination, we can have the image of a unicorn.

[10] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A601/B629.

[11] *Ibid.*, A580/B608.

[12] *Ibid.*, A619/B647.

[13] *Ibid.*, A697/B725.

[14] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23.

[15] *Ibid.*, 60.

[16] *Ibid.*, 27.

[17] *Ibid.*, 104.

[18] Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 201.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*, 202.

[21] James C. Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 197.

[22] *Ibid.*, 233.

[23] *Ibid.*, 9.

[24] *Ibid.*, 236.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
All Praise is due unto God, the Lord of the Worlds, and may His Peace
and Blessings be upon all His Prophets and Saints.

From Instrumental Reason to Sacred Intellect

Hamid Parsania

One of the most outstanding features of the modern world is its rationality: it underlies many of both the positive and negative aspects of modernity. Rationality has numerous levels and dimensions. Any given society develops its own special culture and civilization, depending upon which of these levels is made operative in it. The area of rationality that has become actualized in the modern world, more than any other, is one that can be termed instrumental rationality *('aql abzari)*. This paper will initially present the different meanings, dimensions, limits and levels that have been ascribed to rationality and the rational faculty in man. It will then survey the historical formation and encroachment of instrumental rationality in the modern world, and will continue by noting some of its innate difficulties and defects. In conclusion, a solution to some of these problems will be proposed.

For man's cognitive faculty (*'aql*, reason, or intellect), various meanings have been put forth and terminologies coined [in Islamic thought]. Each one takes into consideration a certain dimension, level, or layer of the faculty in question. Some of these terms are as follows:

1. Instrumental reason *('aql abzari)*
2. Metaphysical reason
3. Speculative reason *(– nazari)*
4. Practical reason *(– 'amali)*
5. Conceptual reason *(– mafhumi)*
6. Intuitive intellect *(– shuhudi)*
7. Sacred intellect *(– qudsi)*
8. Common sense *(– 'urfi)*

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9. Universal intellect *(– kulli)*
10. Individual intellect *(– juzzi)*
11. Empirical reason *(– tajrubi)*
12. Intellect in potential *(– bil-quwah)*
13. Intellect in acquisition *(– bil-malakah)*
14. Intellect in act *(– bil-f'il)*
15. Acquired intellect *(– mustafad)*
16. Active intellect *(– fa'aal)*
17. First intellect *(– awwal)*
18. Horizontal and Vertical intellects

Instrumental Reason *('aql abzari)*

Instrumental reason and rationality is primarily geared for man's complete domination of nature. It was with this meaning of rationality in mind that Francis Bacon, in *Novum Organum*, took knowledge to be the same as power and wrote, "Human knowledge and human power meet in one." Max Weber saw instrumental rationality as one of the defining elements of Western civilization and saw Western man's behavior to be dominated by it. He held that this goal-oriented rationality, or *Zweckrational*, guided social behavior along the lines of the worldly ends within man's reach. He counted technology, industry, and bureaucracy to be the natural results and effects of the domination of rationality in this meaning.

Metaphysical Reason

Metaphysical reason or intellect strives to determine the conditions and states that apply to being itself. Metaphysical laws and axioms, though not limited to the material world, are usually applicable to material existents as well. For example, the axiom of non-contradiction or the principle of causality are relevant in the physical realm as much as in the metaphysical. Questions and issues of philosophy and ontology are the prime concern and responsibility of metaphysical reason.

Speculative Reason *('aql nazari)*

Speculative reason involves itself with realities outside the sphere of human volition. In scope, it is more general than metaphysical reason. This is because the latter is only a part of speculative reason, which includes issues of physics and mathematics in its other parts, and is responsible for addressing them. As well, to the extent that it concerns the knowledge of natural and material realities, instrumental reason comes under the purview of speculative reason.

Practical Reason *(‘aql ‘amali)*

Practical reason and speculative reason are opposites, their realms of application and subjects of study being entirely distinct from one another. Practical reason engages itself with realities based upon man’s will. Do’s, don’ts, manners, personal and social rights, rules, and human organizations are all objects of attention for practical reason. The philosopher Immanuel Kant questioned the value and validity of the cognitive content of speculative reason. In spite of his skepticism about speculative reason, he attempted to defend the substantiality of practical reason. From the foregoing definitions of speculative and practical reason, it is clear that practical reason — just like speculative reason — is a faculty employed in the search for truth and reality. In this meaning, these two rationalities are two parts and domains of human knowledge. Their difference lies in the subject to which they apply themselves. Practical reason is sometimes understood to oppose the cognitive faculty. In such a case, it represents the practical faculty of man. Acts ensuing from it then become acts of beauty and grace, precisely because they conform to the dictates of human reason and intellect. Whenever practical reason is understood in this last sense, speculative reason in contrast is taken to mean the totality of man’s rational cognition. In this case, speculative reason, in addition to being opposed to man’s practical faculty, also becomes pitted against all other non-rational modes of cognition. For instance, it excludes sensuous cognition *(aisthetikon)* and its accompanying divisions of sensuous perception *(aesthesis)*, imagination *(phantasia)*, and memory *(mneme)*.

Conceptual Reason *(‘aql mafhumi)*

Conceptual reason has an even more general meaning than both speculative reason and practical reason. Its central characteristic is that it apprehends its subjects of study by way of mental concepts. Many epistemological discussions are aware of the importance of this type of reason in acquiring knowledge of concrete reality. Kant, though, doubted the substantive content of conceptual reason and devalued its ability to understand the external world. Conceptual reason is increased and expanded by the means and methods of discursive logic.

Intuitive Intellect *('aql shuhudi)*

Intuitive reason or intellect[1] apprehends universal and pervasive realities directly, without the mediation of mental concepts. From one perspective intuitive reason is contrasted with conceptual reason, while from another, intellectual intuition differs from both sensuous intuition (which lies below it and is sub-intellectual) and mystical intuition (which lies above it and is supra-intellectual). Sensual intuition is acquired by way of direct and unmediated contact with individual and material things, whereas its intellectual counterpart is obtained by coming face to face with universal and ubiquitous realities. Supra-intellectual intuition, according to the reports of Muslim mystics, is obtained by a vision of God's beautiful Names and His attributes.

> Mind desired in stealth light from the passional fire
> Then jealousy welled and nigh was the world rent asunder
>
> The courtier desired a glimpse of the inner chamber
> Thundered the voice from beyond, Whither go ye, intruder?![2]

Intuitive reason is the existential root of conceptual reason. Mulla Sadra, a famous Muslim philosopher of the seventeenth century, held conceptual reason to be of a lower order than intellectual reason and the intellect.[3] Kant, by explicitly denying intuitive rationality, cut off the existential and substantive roots of conceptual reason. In so doing, instead of seeing conceptual reason to be a true representation of concrete reality, he saw it as an impediment and a veil hiding it.

Sacred Intellect *('aql qudsi)*

Sacred intellect is the highest type of intuitive intellect. The holder of this intellect is in direct and immediate contact with intellectual realities (or *intellectus* when used to denote a species of being). In expounding on the sacred intellect and its genesis, religious texts, mystics, and philosophers have been prolific. He who has a sacred intellect directly apprehends the essences and realities that others approach only by concepts and discursive demonstrations (*dianoia* and *episteme*). His apprehension of these realities can be likened to the true and prophetic dreams that some people see. According to the mystics and sages, the divine revelations made to Prophets and the inspirations of Saints are consequences of their sacred intellects. The Peripatetic philosophers (*masha'*) call this sacred intellect *'aql mustafad* (acquired intellect). In religious texts, the teacher or medium for "teaching" and conveying the sacred intellect is the Holy Spirit — Gabriel, the divine archangel. This same medium, in philosophical terminology, is an immaterial existent that is sometimes called the Active Intellect (*intellectus agens* or *nous poietikos*).[4]

The person with sacred intellect has access to knowledge that is over and above the acquired and discursive knowledge available to others. So if metaphysical reason can prove the immateriality and eternality of the human soul, then the sacred intellect can provide the details of man's ascent and final felicity. That which is given to humanity by way of sacred intellect in the form of a decree — pertaining to conceptual reason, whether speculative or practical — is called a decree of guidance. This is because sacred intellect guides and leads the way for others towards what they themselves can acquire or become. If, on the other hand, the decree is of such a nature that it is beyond their reach, then it is a decree of origination. A decree of origination is supra-intellectual, but it is not anti-intellectual.

Common Sense *('aql 'urfi)*

Popular reason, or "common sense," is a part of rational cognition or knowledge that has become actualized in the mass mind or perception of society. Common sense can include knowledge acquired and taught to man by way of conceptual reason or sacred intellect, or it can be the collection of perceptions produced in the process of man's practical tendencies and mediated by his imaginations and conjectures. This collection becomes established in any given culture in its movement towards civilization.

Common sense aids in creating man's communal life and shared world. If what is commonly accepted coincides with the findings of conceptual reason, it shows the centrality of intellectuals in that community and is thus called a "common intellectuality". But if, on the other hand, common sense does not agree with conceptual reason and the latter remains silent on the issue, but sacred intellect does refer to it by way of a decree of guidance or origination, then this is tantamount to full-fledged approval. In such a case, society operates under the auspices of sacred intellect. Failing this, society falls to the level of mere common sense.

Universal Intellect *(‘aql kulli)*

Universals are divided into two groups: extended universals *(kulli sa’i)* and conceptual universals *(kulli mafhumi)*. Extended universals take into consideration the existential compass and inclusivity of one single reality; like the human soul, which exists as “soul” and is present in all of its different levels but is not bound to, or limited by, any specific one of them. The universal intellect, in this sense, is an expansive concrete reality[5] and is not conditioned or limited by nature and its contingencies — just like a Platonic Idea. A conceptual universal is that very same expansive mental concept which is predicated of many individuals and applies to all of them equally. The universal intellect, in this particular meaning, is that human faculty which apprehends the universal and general meanings of things, and by this comes to understand the properties of all individual things.[6]

Individual Intellect *(‘aql juzzi)*

The individual intellect is contrasted to, and is the opposite of, the conceptual universal intellect. The cognitive agencies of this intellect apply themselves to individual objects and sense data. The individual intellect is also called “conjecture” *(eikasia)*. Instrumental reason mainly makes use of the individual intellect in its processes.

Empirical Reason *(‘aql tajrubi)*

Empirical reason is the part of speculative reason which applies itself to natural phenomena, and in the process, it uses sense data and empirical analogies. The latter are based on universal and non-empirical propositions taken from the higher levels of the rational faculty, such as metaphysical reason.

Instrumental rationality, more than anything else, has its roots in empirical reason. Due to the predominance of empiricism and sensationalism in instrumental rationality, it denied the non-sensual bases of experimental and experiential knowledge and put (quantitative) inductive methods in the place of analogical ones. Next, by not accepting a valid role for non-sensual propositions in empirical knowledge, it denied their ability to represent concrete reality. Hence, when presenting non-sensual propositions (those whose subject is not strictly material), instrumental rationality — instead of relying on metaphysical reason or sacred intellect — takes recourse in common sense.

The Domination of Instrumental Rationality

Up to this point, eleven terms and concepts directly involving reason and intellect have been briefly discussed. Deliberation upon the very existence of these concepts, or their ability to represent concrete reality and hence their cognitive content, would call for a purely philosophical and epistemological debate and study. This present paper, though, does not approach them from this angle and suspends judgment on these issues. Instead, it now turns to a description of the domination of instrumental rationality and an elucidation of its shortcomings.

The modern world took shape only after turning its back on intuition and the sacred intellect, and the Enlightenment took off in a real way from within the parameters of conceptual reason. Pre-modern philosophers, in a considerable part of their discussions, gave attention to intellectual intuitions and the sacred intellect. The debate about universals and their *modus operandi* was one of the more serious ones between Plato and Aristotle. Plato held that the perception of universal concepts is by way of intuiting and "witnessing" the Ideas (or Forms) — which are the intellects. Aristotle, though he gave more attention to the act of prescinding in the mind, was of the opinion that the causal agent for the existence of the Forms is a heavenly Intellect, which is called the tenth Intellect or the active Intellect. The Muslim philosopher Farabi wrote a book, *al-Jamu' bayn al-Ra'yayn,* in which he deliberated on these two opinions. This debate continued among Muslim philosophers and was taken up by the Peripatetics *(masha'),* the Illuminists *(ishraq),* and the Transcendentalists *(muta'aliyah)* in a very serious fashion. But it was more or less sidelined by the rationalist philosophies that emerged in the modern world.

The enlightenment that preceded the modern world was firmly rooted in the sacred intellect. The enlightenment of the modern age, though, began with conceptual reason. Muslim philosophers like Avicenna and Suhrawardi, by logical demonstrations, proved that the cognition and knowledge of the reality of the human soul is not possible but by recourse to intuitive intellect. Descartes, on the other hand, attempted to find his soul on the level of conceptual and discursive knowledge. Cartesian "intuition" then does not go beyond conceptual truisms.

Intuition, in its meaning of a direct and unmediated apprehension of reality, is limited in the modern world to sub-intellectual levels. Kant's awareness of this fact led him to explicitly deny the existence of intellectual intuition. He came to hold that intellectual concepts have no connection to the external concrete world. He took concepts not reducible to the level of sense data to be impediments to external reality, rather than taking them as guiding lights towards it. In this way, transforming Cartesian skepticism into a formal skepticism, Kant introduced the latter into the very fabric of human cognition and basis of knowledge. For him, conceptual reason could not throw any light on the externally existing world — all philosophical deliberations being limited to the rigid structures of mental concepts. This is how ontology was replaced by epistemology.

Alongside the weakening of intellectualism, sensationalism — which took into consideration only the practical dimension of life — grew stronger. In the nineteenth century, sensationalists and materialists took up the banner of an enlightenment with respect to the external world. At the start, they attempted to shed light upon the concrete world by methods of induction.

The nineteenth century also saw the creation of many an ideology. Just as before this time all things were measured and judged by means of the sacred intellect and metaphysical reason, Auguste Comte and Karl Marx sat in judgment with regard to the same issues. So, where previously the Prophets would speak about the Origin and End of all things, and metaphysicians would prove the existence of immaterial worlds, Comte, Marx, and their like now spoke of a dialectical materialism and the materiality of all parts of the world, denying thereby the metaphysical dimension of existence. The Fall of man from the transcendental levels of being to the natural world now appeared in the form of a story of his descent from the trees to the ground.

Comte held that religious thought and metaphysics corresponded to the periods of man’s childhood and adolescence. He then — in a similar fashion to the Apostles of Jesus — wrote letters to the emperors of his time, asking them to declare their belief in the greatest of all pantheons, experimental science, and its high priest, himself. He expected empirical and individual reason — now inductive in form — to perform the functions of metaphysical and sacred intellect. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Durkheim was still attempting to replace religious morality with a scientific one.

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, the limitations and shortcomings of instrumental reason slowly became apparent. Intellectualist philosophers, and even some materialist philosophers, had known of these limitations from ancient times. Hobbes and Hume, and before them the [scholastics], were aware of the truth that sensory knowledge and instrumental reason could not pass judgment on issues of moral values. Hume had spoken of the separation of knowledge from morality in the eighteenth century, but it wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that this issue became one of public knowledge.

Another point that caught the attention of the intellectual community was the impotence of instrumental reason vis-à-vis metaphysical propositions. Logical positivists of the Vienna Circle — unlike the positivists of the nineteenth century, who took metaphysical propositions into consideration and then refuted them — declared from the outset the meaninglessness of such propositions. Individualistic rationality of the nineteenth century, despite its materialistic bent, would still appraise questions of total being and issues of eschatology, as well as speak on matters of social etiquette and morality. At the beginning of the twentieth century, though, such was not the case. It was with this in mind that Vilfredo Pareto, the Italian sociologist and economist, called the knowledge of the nineteenth century a "stupid knowledge". Viennese positivists, in spite of their awareness of the limitations of sensory knowledge, attempted to separate the realm of science from the other fields of learning, so as to protect its position as the principal means of knowing external reality.

In debate and discussion since the third decade of the twentieth century under the heading of "philosophy of science", one point stands out: the realm of science is not anything separate and different from the other realms of human knowledge. This point was the same old truth that intellectualist philosophers of ancient times were well aware of. They knew that empirical knowledge and sensory data perpetually needed propositions acquired by way of metaphysical and philosophical intellection — such things as the principle of contradiction, impossibility, and causality. They were also aware that the practicability and usefulness of instrumental reason was only feasible in a framework of laws and principles which themselves did not arise from this reason but rather were derived from the practical or sacred intellect.

In consideration of the limitations of instrumental reason and under the prevailing conditions, the metaphysical and sacred intellect — and even practical reason — lost their social role and cultural presence, making it necessary for instrumental reason to look elsewhere for cognitive content and a substantive base of knowledge. It found this "base" in common sense, as previously defined. This is how instrumental knowledge formally came under the sway of what is variously called common sense, paradigm,[7] or life-world. Hence, whenever the authority and validity of the higher and transcendental levels of intellect are doubted or flatly denied, custom and common sense takes over, with the prime factors and sources of cognition being reduced to social and political elements. These same factors and elements, which form the fabric of instrumental reason and knowledge, decide the nature and course of the fundamental propositions. Propositions that take shape in line with customary understanding and common sense are affected by factors with the power and ability to affect the public mind. Hence, the cognitive content and ground of knowledge of instrumental reason is finally and fundamentally tied to the workings of social power. That is, instrumental rationality and knowledge is not only the means and tools for power; it is also one of its products.

While instrumental rationality kept a safe distance from common sense and customary reason, it kept the last flames of enlightenment going for the modern world. Despite labelling metaphysical or value propositions as non-scientific, it still claimed to a true knowledge of reality by means of experimental propositions. But once the distance between instrumental reason (including all that goes by the name of science and empirical knowledge) and common sense was abolished — thereby revealing the fundamental role of non-empirical propositions in empirical knowledge — the instrumental role of empirical knowledge became evermore apparent. The consequence was that its ability to represent external reality came to be doubted and finally rejected.

Now even if instrumental reason, in its capacity as a knowledge (albeit scientific), had kept some semblance of external representability, it still could not have answered the fundamental questions of human existence, questions as to the beginning and end of man and the world, life and death, existence and non-existence, purpose and direction, dos and don’ts, excellences and faults. It is not that man confronts such questions only in times of leisure. Rather, they spring from his very existence and are always with him, his life always corresponding to the type and quality of answers that he finds for them. Man has no choice, he must answer them. The person who has not contemplated and thought about the answers to these questions, dreads to meet them.

The subject of these questions is beyond the limits and purview of instrumental reason. Some of them concern metaphysical intellect, while others have to do with practical reason. In considering the limits of instrumental rationality and its impotence in answering these type of questions, Max Weber held that the modern world — due to an absence of metaphysics — was without any firm standard or scale in relation to these issues. Consequently, this type of world gives licence to all and sundry to follow their carnal desires, and nothing more. Moderns, after some deliberation on the internal structure of instrumental reason, have not only come to see the external limitations of modern science — which are only the natural results of such a rational system — but have come to doubt the internal independence and integrity of this type of rationality in relation to the natural and empirical realm. Hence the representational validity of instrumental reason, even within its own "home" realm, has come under scrutiny and has finally been denied. In this way, any hopes of a modern enlightenment to the truth have been lost and the way towards postmodernism has been opened up.

When instrumental reason gives up the higher levels of intellect and basis of knowledge, it becomes totally engrossed with customs and common sense, the lowest forms of human knowledge and awareness. That is to say, public opinion creates both the basis and decides the directionality for this level of rationality. Now common sense and public opinion are not realities based on methods of logic or intuition; rather they are issues of social power that are in the hands of those controlling the reins of mass media and communications.

Return to Sacred Intellect

The way out of this quagmire is not to deny and oppose instrumental reason. Knowing the present state of affairs and becoming aware of the shortcomings and defects of instrumental rationality is necessary, but not sufficient. Postmodernists have usually satisfied themselves by describing the status quo, calling that which has come to be, an inescapable reality. Their wholehearted acceptance of the authority, power, and dominance of science has all but closed any window of opportunity for the pursuit and disclosure of reality.

The pursuit of truth and reality on the conceptual and practical levels is tantamount to the acceptance and official recognition of conceptual and practical reason. If there is a way out of the crisis of the modern world, without doubt it lies in the direction of researches and inquiries concerning reality on the above-mentioned levels. By reviving such discussions and debates, a culture and civilization will follow that does not satisfy itself with just a refutation of instrumental reason and common sense, but strives to make full use of the other levels and types of rationality and intellectuality. Instrumental and customary rationality, when working under the auspices of higher levels of intellect, become real and acquire intellectual and cognitive content. But when they cut their connection with those higher levels, they become nothing but an unfettered power, blind to itself. Now, the inner content of any such blind power is nothing but a cynical nihilism.

The Prophets of God (may His Peace and Blessings be upon them all) strove from the outset to enrich the intellectual life of men — by calling them to what already lies in, and has been placed in, their innate nature and essence. The Prince of Believers, ‘Ali (upon whom be Peace), has said in this context: “God raised amongst the people His Messengers and sent Prophet after Prophet to them so as to have the Covenant of His nature fulfilled . . . and so as to bring out their hidden intellects.”[8]

There are few words that are seen as abundantly as “intellect” and “knowledge” in the Qur’an. In the Qur’anic terminology, these two words signify faithful representations of concrete reality and denote all the levels of intellect and knowledge — not limited to just empirical or instrumental reason and knowledge. The highest level of intellect is the sacred intellect. Enlightened directly by Divine Grace and inspired by the Holy Spirit, it reveals the Divine Word to man. The next level, that of conceptual and discursive reason (in both its aspects of speculative and practical rationality), applies itself to deliberation on the origin and end of man, defining thereby his duties and responsibilities in this world. The sacred intellect and conceptual reason are divine proofs and His “messengers,” their role being complementary. Man’s conceptual reason allows him access to higher truths and knowledge. The sacred intellect, in the beginning, actuates and engenders man’s discursive reason, and in the end, opens up the higher realms of being.

Modernity starts with the denial of the authority of revelation and the sacred intellect. This denial has its apparent roots in the historical disfavor shown to reason on the part of the Church. The Church’s disregard of conceptual reason led to the inception of a perceived dichotomy and opposition between the two levels of rational cognition.[9] While the Church remained a world power, this opposition worked to the benefit of what was called faith. This same opposition works now, in the modern world, to the favor of reason. In its turn, conceptual reason, by turning its back on intuitive and sacred intellect, has severed its existential roots and has in effect dried up and become lifeless. Instrumental rationality and customary reason, when emptied of the authority and dominion of Intellect and Revelation and made secular, are as two abandoned corpses on the hands of modernity. It is only the light of the Intellect which can revive them, and give life to those who are dead.

Notes

[1] In what follows, the word "intellect" will be used to designate the intuitive faculty *(nous)* in rational cognition, whereas the word "reason" will usually refer to the discursive or inferential faculty *(logos)*. In this sense, "reason", when used by itself and without a qualifying adjective before it, will stand for "ratiocinative reason" *(dianoia)*. Such distinctions were deemed essential due to the bewildering chaos of notions surrounding the words "intellect" and "reason" in our times, and also due to the main theme of this paper. *Trans.*

[2] This is a very freehand paraphrase of a poem by the Iranian poet, Hafiz.

[3] To quote St. Thomas, "Reasoning is a defect of intellect."

[4] Muslim philosophers take this to be the activity of the Divine intelligence. St. Thomas, on the other hand, only sees it to be *choristos* (separate) and *amiges* (pure, unmixed), implying that it is distinct from matter and incorporeal.

[5] In this meaning, the universal intellect extends through the different states and levels of a single individual of a species. *Trans*.

[6] In this more common meaning, the universal intellect extends through the different individuals, potential or real, of that species or the concept and idea of that species. These distinctions are not the same as those referred to by "direct" and "reflex" universals. *Trans*.

[7] The term "paradigm" in this context was coined by Thomas Kuhn. In 1962 Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* which claimed that the sciences do not progress by scientific method. Rather, scientists work within a *paradigm* (set of accepted beliefs), which eventually weakens until new theories and scientific methods replace it.

[8] *Nahj al-Balaghah,* Sermon 1

[9] This remained the historical reality, despite the valiant efforts of such figures as St. Augustine and St. Thomas, who attempted to resolve this opposition in a very real way. See *Summa Theologica,* I:58:3, II-II:49:5.

Pluralist Culture and Truth

David W. Shenk

Mennonites are a "people of the Book." In every Mennonite home across Canada you will find a Bible; in many homes it is the most read book. Muslims are also a people of Scripture. Whenever they gather for worship, Muslims recite or read the Qur'an. Both Mennonites and Muslims believe that God reveals truth in various ways, but especially through the Scriptures. However, both Mennonites and Muslims live in a pluralist world; multitudes around the world do not base their lives on any notions of revealed truth. Especially in a pluralist democracy, decisions are based upon the votes of the people and the decisions of their elected representatives, and not necessarily on God's revelation of truth. This means that democratic decisions and commitments to revealed truth can be in collision. This is true in is Iran; it also the reality in North America.

What are the theological/philosophical foundations for pluralist culture, and how can we be committed to truth in a pluralist or modernist society? These are the two questions that this essay explores. First I will comment on two stories that illustrate the issues: those of Lithuania Christian College in Lithuania, and Shebelli Secondary School in Somalia.

For the last four years I have served at Lithuania Christian College as professor of theology and for three years as academic dean. This college began as an English language institute eleven years ago just as Lithuania was confronting the Soviet Union in a struggle for freedom and independence. The college began because of the vision of key parliamentary leaders in the confrontation with the Soviet system. At their request they met with Otonas Balciunus, a Lithuania Free Christian Church leader, and several of his Mennonite Brethren international associates. With Soviet tanks surrounding the Parliament building where they met, these leaders urged their guests to establish a Christian university in Lithuania. "Why?" asked Otonas and his associates. The Lithuanians responded, "Because we believe that the Christian gospel as understood by the Protestant free churches encourages people to develop healthy pluralist democracy. That spirit respects the dignity and

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freedom of each person and encourages people to develop personal responsibility and integrity. We want a democratic pluralist culture; that is why we need a Christian university that will equip future leaders to embrace democratic pluralist values."

Today, that college has an enrollment of 600 students from a dozen countries, and its graduates are emerging as leaders in the development of democratic pluralist cultures in Lithuania and other countries of Eastern Europe. Is there a contradiction between the Christian faith that confesses that truth is revealed and the development of a pluralist democratic culture? Pluralist democracy is not the Christian faith. Yet, is there something about the Biblical vision of the dignity and freedom of the person as a being created in God's own image and one whom God loves that encourages and nurtures values essential to a healthy pluralist democracy?

The founding parents of Lithuania Christian College believed that atheistic or naturalistic philosophies such as Nazism, Marxism, and Darwinian evolutionary theory, when applied to human development, are destructive to the well-being of the person. In contrast, they contended that Biblical faith is a foundation (some said the only true foundation) for authentic commitment to respect for human life, freedom, and dignity. Were they correct in their conviction that Biblical faith plants the seed in a culture that in time encourages the development of pluralist democracy?

The development in Lithuania is similar to my experience in Muslim Somalia, where for ten years (1963-73) I was involved in developing Somalia Mennonite Mission schools. In monocultural Islamic Somalia, schools operated by a Christian/Mennonite mission were rather remarkable. Yet students from across the nation pled to come to our schools. I do not think it was that we taught subjects such as mathematics better than the Islamic government schools, but rather it was the spirit of free inquiry and respect for the person that was such a powerful magnet. Students often commented that in our schools they could challenge a teacher, and she would commend them for creative thinking!

Although nearly thirty years ago the Soviet revolution in Somalia insisted that all Mennonite schools be turned over to the government, even today Somalis often refer to the graduates of our schools as "Mennonites." We ask what they mean, since most of our graduates are practicing Muslims and only a few have become Christians. The answer we hear is that in the midst of clan divisions that have divided Somalia in recent years, graduates of the

Mennonite schools have a different spirit. They respect and appreciate diversity. They participate in their clans but seek to build understandings and respect that transcend clan or religious differences. In the clan conflicts that have torn the Somali nation apart, graduates of the Mennonite Mission schools encourage reconciliation and a commitment to pluralist multi-clan society.

Nomadic Islamic Somalia and agricultural post-Soviet Lithuania are tremendously different societies; yet in both settings Christian/Mennonite education nurtured a respect for pluralistic culture and personal differences. And this contribution to encouraging a pluralist culture was exceedingly attractive to many. Is there something within a Mennonite understanding of the Christian gospel that encourages the development of pluralist cultures and societies? On the other hand, what is an Iranian Muslim approach to pluralist culture? This present paper does not address that question. (For a thoughtful statement on Iranian Islam as it relates to pluralist culture, see Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*.) This paper explores a Mennonite/Anabaptist approach to pluralist cultures, but I hope it will invite a response or critique from Muslim colleagues in this dialogue.

The Pluralist Challenge

Democracy can only function if there is a respect for differences. In my neighborhood in Pennsylvania there are Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Mormons, and secularists. Most never go to church. The secularists do not believe that God reveals truth. The Muslims and Christians do believe in revealed truth, but the truth they believe in is quite different. The Muslims believe that the revealed Qur'an is the final authority; the Christians confess that Jesus the Messiah as revealed in the Biblical scriptures is the fullest revelation of truth. There are at least eight church buildings in my pluralist community, and every Sunday most are filled with worshippers who gather as congregations and then scatter again into the community where they live and work.

That we are a pluralist society challenges beliefs in universal revealed truth. Many of the sermons preached in the churches on Sunday are intended to help equip believers to be faithful in the face of challenges they experience at work and where they live. Here are three ways that believers in revealed truth experience that challenge.

First, those who believe in revealed truth disagree about what the truth is. A little over a year ago I was involved in six dialogues with a Muslim theologian, Shabir Ally, in the United Kingdom; five of the events were in universities. At the beginning of each evening he provided “proofs” that the Qur’an is the final and authoritative revelation from God. Thereafter, he dismissed as corruption anything I said that was based upon the Bible and diverged from the Qur’an. The dialogue was quite difficult because our assumptions about the foundations for truth were so different. Recognizing such difficulties, many in our pluralistic world simply assume that any notions about revealed truth are nonsense.

In Western societies people ask, “How can we believe that truth is revealed by God when there is no agreement about what that truth is?” Many Western university students conclude that, since believers in revelation disagree, “Let’s just assume that there is no such thing as revelation.” That notion pervades modern Western societies. In fact, as far as I could discern, the only people who came to the well-advertised dialogues in the United Kingdom were evangelical Christians and Muslim students. The secularists did not bother to attend. Agnosticism and unbelief in revelation prevails within pluralist Western societies.

Second, there is a fear that those who believe in revealed truth will impose that truth on others who do not believe. Democracy is about freedom and respect. It involves a debate about values. But if a person claims that he knows the truth, perhaps he will try to force that truth upon others. That concern has been part of the American experience right from the beginning of European settlements in the New World.

The Pilgrims left England to find religious freedom in the New World. In 1620 their ships landed at Plymouth Rock, and these settlers, members of the Reformed Puritan tradition, developed the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They wanted the colony’s laws to be in accordance with God’s revealed truth. However, the Baptist Christians who joined the settlement had another tradition. The Puritan settlers in Massachusetts denied the Baptists freedom to worship according to their beliefs. Consequently the Baptists had to leave Massachusetts and settled in Rhode Island.

That event is one reason that in the United States separation of church and state is so important. Ever since that experience nearly 400 years ago, the Baptists, like the Mennonites, have always worked for the separation of the two. When the state establishes a religion, or favors one religion, that means minorities are at a disadvantage. There is a deep conviction among groups like the Mennonites that no government should take upon itself the authority to impose religion on anyone. And that is a widespread concern within American society as a whole. A person should be free to believe, but not free to force others to believe. The same is true of the government; no government has the authority to determine what a person should believe, for God has created each of us with the freedom to choose what we will believe; God even frees us to be atheists.

However, in a democracy, it is not an easy road to confess the truth but not force it upon others. Abortion is an example of the difficulties. I suppose that all the churches and all Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States and Canada teach that abortion is contrary to God's will. This is not a matter, the churches and the mosques insist, that one can vote about. Even if most people favor abortion, that does not change the truth — abortion is a destruction of human life and therefore sin. Christians and Muslims agree that you can't vote on that! This is revealed truth. However, can and should the churches and mosques impose that commitment upon society as a whole? In the United States for the last several decades this issue has caused a raging debate in every presidential election.

Third, there is a widespread notion that the only basis for knowing the truth is scientific investigation. Many within North American society believe that since people cannot agree on revelation, then science should become our final authority. However, it is increasingly evident that science and objective investigation alone are not capable of revealing the meaning of human life and history. Furthermore, science that has no reference point in revelation has touched our world with a taste of hell: witness Nazism and Marxism. Neither could these ideologies be critiqued, because they were supposedly founded on the scientific truth of evolution (Nazism) or dialectical materialism (Marxism). As Christians we believe that it is only through revelation from God that we can ultimately know the truth about the meaning of human life.

I am not sure that my Muslim colleagues agree with these statements. Quite frequently Muslim theologians have told me that Islam is so rational that, even without revelation, one would come to the conclusions of Islam through objective investigation. However, as I understand it, this is different from the Christian understanding. On the one hand, Christians believe that the deception within humanity is so deep that on our own we do not find the truth. On the other, the nature of the Gospel is so surprising that one can only receive the Gospel through revelation, both in Scripture and through the personal enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

In Western societies the growing awareness that science cannot reveal ultimate truth means that many people choose to become agnostic; they assume that the truth about the meaning of human life and destiny cannot be known, unless it is to believe that we have no purpose, that we are only an advanced form of biological life. Yet both church and mosque give witness that there is a God who reveals the mystery of the meaning of human life and destiny. The challenge that faces both Christians and Muslims is this: How do we make that confession in the modern pluralist world in a way that our witness to the reality of revelation can be heard and understood?

The Church and Pluralist Culture

The church as Jesus the Messiah envisaged it is a community of believers called out from other communities. It is a people who gather for worship, who serve God and witness in faithfulness, and who live within societies that might not be in any sense "Christianized." It is a people from among the peoples, a people who are in the world, but who are a community for whom God is their ultimate authority (John 17: 11-18). Thus it is not surprising that the early church was a persecuted minority movement in vigorously pluralist and mostly polytheistic societies. The church had no political power, for it was a movement on the margins of society. In fact it was persecuted, not only in the Roman Empire but also in regions beyond the bounds of the Empire. For example, tradition tells us that the Apostle Thomas was martyred by Hindu Brahmans on a hill outside Madras.

Issues related to pluralism and truth were one reason for Roman persecution of Christians for much of the first 300 years of church history. The Roman emperors demanded that all citizens in the Empire venerate the genius of the Emperor. Christians would not do this, for they confessed that there is only one God and that Jesus is God's Anointed One. The emperors did not object to Christians worshipping as they wanted to, but they could not condone their refusal to worship the genius of the Emperor. Occasionally the persecutions were horrendous, with the torture and death of thousands of believers.

Then in the early fourth century, Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the Empire. Later he went further, and took steps to favor Christianity as the state religion. He went to war against Persia, with bishops marching with his armies to bless the soldiers as they went into battle. The Zoroastrian backlash in Persia against the Christians at that time was horrendous, and persecution greatly weakened the Persian church. The Western church became a church with political power, but the Eastern church suffered greatly as a consequence. Before Constantine, Christians refused to serve in the army, for they declared that all warfare was contrary to Christ; now "Christian" Roman soldiers were fighting Persia in the name of Christ with bishops praying for their success.

Nearly a century later Bishop Augustine in the Roman province of Numidia in North Africa began to write theologies about the church and political power. In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote that the church and the state are two kingdoms, the City of God and the City of Man. Since the church is the City of God and is eternal, then that city has ultimate authority over the state or City of Man. With that understanding, the church in the Western experience wielded great influence and power over the Empire and all European governments. One consequence was the crusades to take the "Holy Lands" from the Muslims. Another consequence was Western military conquest of some Eastern church regions to bring them back into the fold of the Western Catholic Church.

Augustine believed that people outside the true Mother Church, the Catholic Church, would be damned. So he wrote that the state must work with the church to "compel" those outside to come in. And he believed it was necessary to do whatever was required to prevent heretics from within the church to succeed in teaching or practicing their wrong teaching. This is an oversimplification of the issues, but in order to understand the approach of the Western church to pluralism for over a thousand years after Constantine, it is necessary to know something about Augustine's theology of the church and state and the approach to pluralism.

A consequence of all of this is that Europe became "Christendom." Sometimes Christian armies used force, as in Lithuania, to compel the populace to be baptized. Dissent was not permitted within this European union of church and state systems. People who believed or taught anything contrary to the official church doctrine could be burned at the stake. Even Bibles were not permitted, because they might give people ideas different from official doctrine. The bishops and pope knew the truth, and the people were expected to follow the teachings and practices they proclaimed. Jews were harassed and sometimes persecuted, for they did not fit into a Christian Europe. There was no place for pluralist societies.

Then in 1450 an event occurred that changed European Christendom forever: Johann Gutenberg printed an Italian translation of the Bible on his newly invented printing press! Within fifty years low cost translations of the Bible were available in many European languages; all this happened even though the official church was against circulating Bibles. People began Bible study groups in their own mother tongue.

As people studied the Scriptures, some like Martin Luther began to question some of the doctrines and practices of the Catholic church. With much struggle this finally led to the formation of the Protestant church, and so Europe began to experience Christian pluralism, with Catholic churches and Protestant churches. However, all the Protestant groups, such as the Reformed and Lutheran denominations, continued to work hand-in-hand with the state. If the government was Lutheran, then people in that state were also Lutheran; if the prince was Catholic, babies in that principality were baptized as Catholics.

However, in Zurich, Switzerland in 1525 a small Bible study group came to a different conclusion, namely that no government has the authority to determine what a person believes. Baptism as taught by Jesus and the New Testament church should be only for those who are adults and who have chosen to believe in Jesus the Messiah and follow him as true disciples. So they baptized each other. That was the beginning of the Anabaptist movement that eventually brought into being denominations such as the Mennonites and the Baptists.

By baptizing adults, Anabaptists were declaring that infants and children, who do not know what they believe, should not be baptized. Of course, if infants are not baptized, then the government cannot determine the faith of anyone. So in sixteenth-century Switzerland a movement began that soon spread to most countries in Europe wherein people were baptized as adults and only after confessing faith in Jesus the Messiah. Even though the Anabaptists were a small minority and severely persecuted by both Catholic and Protestant state church authorities, their insistence on adult baptism turned Europe upside down. As a minority movement, they shattered the state church system, and opened Europe to pluralistic cultures and religious freedom.

A century later the Enlightenment philosophers picked up Anabaptist themes of personal freedom and choice and applied them to the foundations for modern democracy. But it was the Anabaptists who had led the way. By insisting on adult baptism they were blazing the way forward for the global commitments today to human rights, religious freedom, and pluralistic culture. The "powerless" and persecuted Anabaptists practiced freedom of religion within Christendom, thereby beginning the process that has resulted in transforming Christendom into societies where freedom to believe or not to believe is a deeply-held commitment.

The Anabaptists also respected the realities of international pluralism, and sought to build bridges of peace with peoples considered enemies of Western Europe. As the Anabaptist movement was beginning, Western Europe was locked in combat with the Ottomans under Suleyman the Magnificent; the Hungarians were defeated by the Ottoman Muslims and Vienna came under siege. Western Europe was terrified and mobilization for war prevailed, but the Anabaptists refused to join the war hysteria. One of their leaders, Michael Sattler, was tortured and killed because he was committed to sharing the Gospel with the Turks, but he would never kill a Turk, for they were loved of God. In a Europe fighting against Muslim invaders from the east, the Anabaptists refused to take the sword, for they believed it was contrary to the spirit and teachings of Jesus. Rather, their goal was to work for peace with the Turks. Thus the Anabaptists practiced a truth that inspired commitments to pluralist societies within Europe and trust-building efforts among nations.

Theological Foundations

We will now briefly explore theological themes in the New Testament that have inspired the Mennonite Church's approach to pluralistic culture and truth. I will focus on just one event in the life of Jesus the Messiah: his crucifixion and resurrection and the formation of the church. I acknowledge this is in divergence from the mainstream of Muslim teachings. Yet this event is so central to Anabaptist understandings of truth and pluralism that I will explore it with some care. Throughout the account I will insert a brief commentary on the significance of the incident for an Anabaptist perspective.

Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He became exceedingly famous after he fed 5,000 hungry men plus women and children by receiving a gift of five loaves and two fishes from a little boy and then breaking the bread and fishes, thereby miraculously multiplying this modest gift of food. This event happened near the Sea of Galilee, where a huge crowd had gathered to hear him teach. Thereafter the Galileans wanted to make him their king; an army of Galilean Zealots would gladly have followed the command of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God is concerned for people's well-being; the hungry were fed! However, the miracle-working Messiah did not feed them from nothing. He used the generous gift of food from a little boy in this miracle. Likewise today, God is concerned for the hungry and poor, and he needs our generosity to care for their needs. The truth of faith in a pluralistic world is demonstrated in the generosity of believers toward the poor. However, the Galileans believed that for the Kingdom of God to succeed on earth, it must be established and preserved through political and military power. Many people assume the same today.

Jesus refused the invitation to become king in Galilee, and thereafter resolutely set his face for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He told his disciples that when they arrived there the people would take the Son of Man and "mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him." On the third day he would rise again (Luke 18:32, 33). The disciples could not believe that this could be true, for they did not believe it was possible for the Messiah to suffer and be crucified. The Kingdom that the Messiah came to establish is created through suffering, not through military and political power. This reality is completely different from the assumptions of the religions of humankind and our political systems and nationalistic societies.

Finally the Messiah approached the Mount of Olives on the eastern borders of the city. He mounted a colt, and children began to follow him, shouting in great joy, "Hosanna!" As he approached the crest of the Mount, he stopped his colt and wept, because Jerusalem would not receive "what would bring you peace" (Luke 19:41).

Five centuries earlier the prophet Zechariah had written that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt and "proclaim peace to the nations." His rule would extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:9-10).

The peace that the Messiah brought and proclaimed can only be received voluntarily. He wept because Jerusalem was rejecting his peace. I suppose that through the presence of his Spirit, he is weeping over Jerusalem today as he did 2,000 years ago. The mission of the Messiah was to establish the rule of God throughout the earth, but the rule and peace of God can only happen as people voluntarily accept the Messiah's rule. The Messiah proclaimed peace, but he did not and does not force it upon anyone. The Kingdom of God is a gift offered but not a rule imposed. It extends throughout the earth and consists of people from every tribe and nation who voluntarily accept to enter it.

Jesus rode that colt down into Jerusalem with the throngs of children continuing their jubilant singing. He rode straight to the Jewish temple, where merchants were selling animals or grain that people needed to offer as sacrifices in their worship. The merchants were overcharging the people. The Messiah used a whip of grass and chased the merchants and cattle from the temple, declaring, "Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17).

It seems that the location of these unjust merchants in the temple was in the court of nations, where non-Jewish Gentiles came to worship. By cleansing the temple of these merchants Jesus was making several things clear: (1) God wants justice. If we are committed to truth, then we need to join with God in confronting all injustice; (2) God wants everyone to be welcome to worship him. He is a pluralist God! It is totally contrary to God's will to make the Gentiles feel unwelcome when they come to the temple of God; (3) The Messiah does not use violence against the merchants when he cleanses the temple. His only weapon is a whip of grasses which he uses on the cattle. In this act Jesus modeled a nonviolent approach in the struggle for justice in our pluralist and sometimes most unjust world.

The evening before his arrest and trial, Jesus ate the Jewish Passover meal with his disciples. He was aware that one of them, Judas, intended to betray him and had arranged with the authorities for Jesus' arrest. Jesus arose from the table and took a basin of water and a towel and washed the feet of each disciple, including Judas, as a servant would do. Then the Messiah gave Judas a sop of bread dipped in broth to eat from Jesus' own hands. After all this, Jesus said to him, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (John 13:27). Judas went out into the night to arrange to guide the soldiers on how they could secretly arrest Jesus.

This remarkable account is very significant in forming an Anabaptist understanding of how people committed to righteousness and truth should confront evil in pluralist cultures. We believe that the Messiah is the in-history revelation of the fullness of the truth of God. He is the Truth in human form. Yet when Judas decided to betray him, the Messiah washed his feet and gave him a sop of food from his own dish. He confronted his betrayer, Judas, with the ghastly horror of what he planned to do while also reaching out in service, compassion, and love. Yet the Messiah freed Judas to go ahead with his diabolical plan. In this episode we see ultimate Truth and wickedness in confrontation. The only weapon the Messiah used was (1) confronting Judas with clear truth-telling, (2) extending acts of kindness and service, and (3) freeing Judas to choose his life direction, even the freedom to choose the road that leads to destruction.

That same evening the Messiah took bread and broke it, sharing portions with each disciple, and he also took a cup of wine and shared it with them. As he did this he said, "This is my body given for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:19, 20).

In these symbols, practiced in churches around the world, Jesus was proclaiming that in his crucifixion a new covenant community is created, the church, whose members are a forgiven people called to forgive, love, and suffer in the same spirit as the Messiah practiced. The church is people called by God to be a covenant community, a healing ministry within the nations among whom they are present. The broken bread and grape juice are symbols of life being birthed through suffering: broken bread, crushed grapes. That is the mission of the church, a community that gives itself in redemptive suffering love as the Messiah has exemplified.

That night Jesus was arrested, and the next day the Biblical accounts describe his beatings and then crucifixion between two thieves. Pilate, the Roman governor, had this taunting title placed above his head: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. As Jesus was hanging on that cross dying, he cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Christians believe that God was fully present in the Messiah crucified. In that cry of forgiveness as he died, all of us are invited into forgiveness. This is to say that the truth center of the universe is fully revealed in the vulnerable and forgiving embrace of the Messiah crucified. If this is true, then there is nothing imperialistic or coercive in the nature of the Kingdom of God. All earthly kingdoms use a variety of earthly power and control. But the power and control exercised by Jesus on the cross is the power of redemptive love. The vulnerable love revealed in the Messiah crucified is "healing for the nations" (Rev. 22:2). The church is called to confess and practice that kind of grace in its life and ministry among the nations.

Three days later, some women came to the tomb where they had buried Jesus, and found that it was empty. Two angels informed the astonished women that Jesus had arisen from the dead. Thereafter, for the next forty days, the resurrected Jesus appeared at least eleven times to a number of his disciples and followers. On one occasion he appeared to a gathering of 500 (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Then in a final appearance, he led his disciples to a hill and commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until receiving the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be his witnesses throughout the world. The Messiah blessed them with his peace, and then ascended into heaven, where a cloud obscured him from their sight.

The resurrected Messiah left no relics behind. He left no plan for the church. He left only a promise that the Holy Spirit would come. All of this is to say that the universal church's only center is the Spirit of the risen Messiah who is present when believers meet together in worship. This reality gives the church remarkable diversity and flexibility. The universal church is a pluralist movement with no language, cultural, or geographical center.

Ten days after the Messiah's ascension, 120 disciples were gathered in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem, at the Jewish Feast of Pentecost or First Fruit. Suddenly the Holy Spirit fell on them and they began to proclaim the "wonders of God." People came from across the city to see and hear what was happening. Those who gathered came from at least a dozen different nations; miraculously each person heard the gospel proclaimed in his/her own mother tongue. As the disciples preached, many believed, and by the end of the day they had baptized 3,000 people. This is the birthday of the church.

The many languages spoken when the church was born are the beginning of the church as a pluralist community. Anabaptist churches believe that God intends for the church to take deep root into the local culture as the Gospel becomes incarnated in language and cultural groups. This is a core reason for translating the Bible into local languages. It is also the reason that the church is an exceedingly diverse community, united in faith, but celebrating the richness of local culture. When a people embrace the Scriptures in their own language and culture, the Biblical message empowers them to challenge injustice in their own culture and to transform that which is not good. It also empowers them to critique the cultural imperialism of outsiders to their culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will share a conversation with a high school principal in Kazakhstan. My wife and I were visiting her school in Aktobe, and told her that we were from Lithuania Christian College. Her immediate response was, "Oh! But we are afraid of religion." We responded, "We are also afraid of religion. But the Messiah critiques all expressions of religion that are harmful to the well-being of people. We believe that God loves each person, and that we are also called to love and respect one another as people created in God's image and to be committed to the dignity and well-being of each student." "That is so wonderful!" she exclaimed. She promptly rang the bell, all classes were suspended, and students and teachers gathered for an assembly to hear more about Lithuania Christian College, where the goal is to live in submission to God as revealed in the Messiah, and to express his love to each student in such a way that each person's freedom and dignity is respected.

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A Typology of Responses to the Philosophical Problem of Evil in the Islamic and Christian Traditions

Jon Hoover

Divine and Human Ways of Dealing with Evil

Islam and Christianity both give accounts of how God deals with things like unbelief, sin, injustice, suffering, and alienation, things that we can bring together under the rubric of 'evil'. For Christians, God confronts evil by entering history to redeem his creation, primarily in Jesus Christ (soteriology). For Muslims, God deals with evil by sending messengers and books to guide humankind, culminating in Muhammad the Prophet and the Holy Qur'an (prophetology/*nubuwwa*). Shi'i Muslims add that God continues to guide and sustain the world through the Hidden Imam.

Although Muslims and Christians tell different stories of how God overcomes evil, we share the problem of how to cope with the fact that God has not yet eliminated evil completely. One can make long lists of the ways that we try to meet this challenge. We pray, protest, teach, obey God, agitate for political change, and wait patiently for God to act. The efficacy and rightness of these various means are sometimes subjects of vigorous debate. This can be seen, for example, in Christian disagreements over whether Christians may engage in warfare to solve political problems.

The Philosophical Problem of Evil

The subject of this paper is another controversial way of coping with evil: explaining it. This means finding solutions to the philosophical problem of evil that emerges in questions such as the following. Why has God not yet eliminated evil? What is God like that he should coexist with evil? Is evil somehow good? And, why do the innocent suffer? This paper surveys the ways that Muslims and Christians have answered such questions and groups them into three types: 1) divine voluntarism, 2) optimism or best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicies, and 3) free-will theodicies. We will look at the broad sweep of both the Islamic and Christian traditions but make very few references to

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writings that are specifically Mennonite or Shi'i. However, views held by Shi'is and Mennonites are noted, and it will become apparent that I work within the traditional Mennonite affirmation of human free will.

Objections to Philosophical Reflection on Evil

For some Muslims and Christians, raising the problem of evil borders on the blasphemous, and there is widespread feeling among Sunni Muslims that dwelling on this problem is a road to unbelief (cf. Qur'an 21:23). For some Christians, including some Mennonites, thinking through the problem is an inadequate response to evil, and compassionate ministry with the suffering is set forth in its stead. Mennonite pastor Leo Hartshorn articulates this view, contending that "intellectual answers do not adequately address the problem of evil. . . . Ethical action for another person's well-being takes precedence over untangling intellectual and theological pretzels."[1] A few modern Christian theologians have gone further and charged that supplying reasons for horrors insults the suffering, sanctions evil, and deadens initiative to oppose it.[2]

The opposition between thought and action implied in these claims can be misleading. Certainly, 'intellectual answers' do not eliminate evil by themselves. In most cases we need to do more than take up the pen to overcome it. And there are surely times when offering an explanation for tragedy is a sign of ignorance at best and a mark of complicity with the perpetrator of evil at worst. Yet, wrestling with the problem of evil among the suffering is an important part of expressing compassion. This problem often rears its head in the midst of religious competition and when religious frameworks fail to adequately interpret experiences of radical evil. Old answers ring hollow, and life no longer makes any sense. It is here that the philosophical problem of evil becomes a practical problem of finding reason to live within a particular religious tradition or even to live at all. In the face of despair at the irrationality of suffering and evil, especially all that has occurred in modern times, we cannot retreat from the problem of evil in the name of compassion. Silence is at times fitting until the shock of tragedy wears off. However, the battle to make sense of the senseless must eventually begin if evil is to be overcome.[3]

A Three-Fold Typology of Responses to the Problem of Evil

1. Divine Voluntarism

Divine voluntarism seeks to place God above the exigencies of reason implied in the problem. The divine voluntarism of the Ash‘ari theology that is fairly widespread in Sunni Islam well illustrates the type. The Ash‘aris uphold God’s exclusive power, unfettered will, and metaphysical self-sufficiency. God is subject to no external constraint, and he creates all things — evil included — without deliberation, cause, or rational motive. Since God wills what he wills without reason, inquiring into God’s purposes is not valid. As the Ash‘ari theologian al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153) puts it, “It is not said, ‘Why did He bring the world into existence, and why did He create servants?’”[4] Thus for the Ash‘aris, God’s creation of evils such as unbelief and injustice are susceptible to no explanation except that God wills them. In fact, all that God wills is just, simply by virtue of the fact that God wills it.[5]

Divine voluntarism is also found in the Christian tradition, perhaps most rigorously in the Protestant reformer John Calvin (d. 1564). Calvin condemns all speculation into reasons for God’s acts, and, although he speaks of God’s ‘secret counsel’, he also asserts that God’s will does not have a cause outside that will, and he upholds the justice of God’s sheer will.[6]

It is easy to criticize the voluntarist view of divine justice on moral grounds. The Mu’tazili theologians, about whom I will say more later, charge the Ash‘ari God with injustice and folly. How could God be just to predetermine that some disbelieve and then suffer punishment, and is not God a fool to command people to believe while simultaneously creating unbelief in them? Likewise, Calvin’s doctrine that God predestined the damnation of the wicked from eternity disturbs our moral sensitivities. However, these critiques assume that God’s activity should be rational and comprehensible to the human mind, and this is, of course, what Calvin and the Ash‘aris reject.

The predestination and the lack of what I will call ‘libertarian freedom’ in Calvinism and Ash‘arism raise a further ethical problem. Can human beings be held accountable to divine commands if they do not have free choice? This is not the place to go into the complexities of how predestinarians have tried to understand human action. Instead, I will borrow the term ‘compatibilist freedom’ from modern philosophy of religion to denote their core conviction that predestination is not incompatible with human choice and responsibility.

In compatibilist freedom, an external cause — either God or a secondary cause — determines our wills in such a way that we paradoxically perceive ourselves to be freely choosing and morally responsible for our deeds.[7]

I will be noting that each type of solution to the problem of evil does not yield a wholly predictable response on the ethical plane.[8] In the case of divine voluntarism, the exaltation of God's power and his radical freedom may evoke reverence and obedience before a mysterious and holy God. However, the notion of compatibilist freedom may prove unconvincing and may engender passivity and moral laxity in the face of predestination. At worst, perceived injustice or caprice in the inscrutable will of a voluntarist God may provoke disgust and rebellion.

Yet, the divine voluntarism of Ash‘aris and Calvinists does not necessarily yield a capricious and inscrutable God, and this is because God predestines all things. Predestination implies a divine promise to complete the creation in the way predestined, and the content of what God has promised has been partially revealed in scriptures. Ash‘aris and Calvinists also usually trust God to bring them to some end which they deem good for themselves, namely, Paradise. In this case there is a correspondence between divine and human value in the workings of God's will that contradicts a full rejection of divine rationality. Ultimately, divine voluntarism falls into the paradox of asserting that God works outside the realm of human rationality while speaking rationally of God's relationship with humankind.[9]

2. Best-of-all-Possible-Worlds Theodicies/Optimism

In contrast to divine voluntarism, theodicies argue that God does indeed have reasons for creating a world in which there is evil, even if human beings cannot always fully comprehend them. Marilyn McCord Adams helpfully distinguishes two broad strands of theodicy in western Christian thought, and this may be extended to Islamic thought as well. The 'best-of-all-possible-worlds' strand argues that evil is necessary or inevitable to God's creation of the best possible world, while the 'free-will' strand maintains that the great goods of human dignity and freedom justify God's creation of a world so full of evil.[10] The best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicy, also called optimism, forms the second type in my typology and free-will theodicies the third type.

Optimism maintains that God fully determines all existents and that everything God creates is wholly good and the best possible from God's perspective. Evil is only evil relative to us, and it is nothing more than an instrument in God's creation of the best possible world overall. Here we must ask: What kind of value calculus is at work in God's will that makes this world, so evidently full of evil, the best of all possible worlds?

Arthur Lovejoy shows in *The Great Chain of Being* how the Neoplatonic value of 'plentitude' was employed to answer this question in medieval Christian theology and then in the optimism of the eighteenth century. In Neoplatonism, the ineffable One, which is beyond 'being', overflows and emanates the world. 'Being' or 'existence' as such is good, perfect, and beautiful. Evil is explained metaphysically as non-being and imperfection, which are most acute at the farthest reaches of the divine effusion. Moreover, following what Lovejoy calls the 'principle of plenitude', the One fills the universe with every imaginable variety of creature in a 'great chain of being' that extends from the highest possible perfection down to the least. This world is better the more existence and diversity it contains, and the best possible world is one that contains every possible evil.[11]

In much medieval Christian thought, as for example in Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), and then most fully in Leibniz (d. 1716) and other eighteenth-century optimists, moral and natural evil were interpreted in light of the metaphysical sense of evil as non-being and privation.[12] The principle of plenitude then served to explain the manifold evils in the world, and it provided a reason to make one's peace with reality and celebrate it as it was. However, the implication that every evil that exists is necessary for the greater good may also breed pessimism. The French writer Voltaire (d. 1778) attacked the eighteenth century's so-called 'optimism' because he deemed it less troubling not to have reasons for evil than to know that necessity required it from eternity. Being supplied with reasons for evils actually made them worse.[13] Earlier, I mentioned the similar criticism in some modern theology, namely that explaining evil only adds insult to injury for the suffering and serves to justify it.

Islamic best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicies sometimes explain God's creation of evil in terms of religious values instead of plenitude. Sufi optimism gives evil significance as an instrument of divine discipline on the spiritual path toward God.[14] The fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), an important inspiration for modern Sunni revivalists, explains evil in a similar fashion. God creates evil for the wise purposes of purifying us through testing, deterring us from sin, and providing opportunity for us to develop virtues such as humility and repentance. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya asks whether we should then sin in order to repent. He says that we should not, for this would be like drinking poison in order to take the antidote.[15]

For other Muslim optimists, evil is necessary for knowledge. The well-known Sunni al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) notes that things are known only by their opposites. Thus, illness is necessary to enjoy health, and Hell is necessary so that those in Paradise realize their blessedness.[16] The tenth-century Sunni theologian al-Maturidi (d. 333/944) explains that God in his wisdom creates evil as a tool to lead human beings to knowledge of God. In its own peculiar way, evil shows the contingency of the creation and thus its need for the Creator. Moreover, the wise way in which God combines harmful and beneficial things leads to knowledge of His unity.[17]

With the Sufi theosophy of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240), which has had significant influence in both the Sunni and the Shi'i worlds, we again notice the imprint of the Neoplatonic principle of plentitude.[18] For Ibn 'Arabi, God's intention in giving existence to the universe is to make himself known. In all things, God reveals his names, names like All-Merciful, Giver of Death, and Giver of Life. These names extend in number far beyond the traditional ninety-nine to encompass every possible form of existence. Evil and imperfection do, in some sense, obstruct obedience to divine Law. Yet, in another sense, evil is nothing more than privation and 'otherness' from God, and it is necessary to give God opportunity to manifest the great diversity of his names.[19]

Just as Leibniz has drawn contradictory responses in the western Christian tradition, so also has Ibn 'Arabi among Muslims. Defenders of Ibn 'Arabi explain that his intention is not to undermine the divine Law but to guide people to happiness through it. Yet, his thought has been used for antinomian ends. Some reduce the notion that everything in existence reveals God to a monism in which everything is divine. Then, they argue that since all things are divine no distinction between good and evil remains, and everything becomes licit.[20]

In sum, the aim of these theodicies is usually to engender obedience and trust in God by inspiring awe at his perfect creation or by explaining evil as an instrument of divine training. Optimism can also provide hope and comfort in the midst of suffering that God will work everything out for the best in the end, and it can be a source of strength to accept what is and to move on to other things. Conversely, optimism with its inherent determinism suffers from the same problem of denigrating human freedom that is found in divine voluntarism. At best, human freedom is compatibilist, and at worst, optimism reduces to a monism that abolishes moral categories completely. Moreover, best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicies may engender depression and disgust at the necessity of such a horrible world and God's inability to do better.

This brings us to a metaphysical difficulty with optimism: it endangers God's omnipotence and freedom. Lovejoy points out that there are two conflicting senses of divine goodness at work in Plato, Neoplatonism, and, by extension, much medieval Christian theology. The first sense corresponds to the values of divine voluntarism. God's goodness consists in being self-sufficient and totally without need for a world. If God had never created the world, he would have been no less God, and he is no better off for having created it. The second, and very different, sense of God's goodness is generosity and productivity. A good God will necessarily create, as in the Neoplatonic vision of the One that by its very nature emanates the world from eternity. Here God would not be God without his world.[21]

Lovejoy explains that these contradictory notions of God's goodness sit uncomfortably side-by-side in medieval Christian thought from Augustine onward, with divine self-sufficiency holding pride of place.[22] Aquinas, for example, employs the principle of plenitude to make sense of evil, and he saves God from the caprice of voluntarism by arguing that God's goodness controls his creative will. Yet, Aquinas evades the necessitarianism implicit in these ideas to preserve God's free choice in creation and the possibility that God could have created a better universe.[23]

In the Islamic tradition, however, the philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) gives full rein to God's productive goodness in eternally emanating the best possible world, and he draws sharp critique from both medieval and modern defenders of God's freedom. A recent study argues that Ibn Sina's emanation scheme nullifies his claim that God wills and intends good. Ibn Sina's God could never will or intend anything, and therefore cannot be held responsible for evil because he is nothing more than "an instrument in the hands of necessity."[24] Such criticism of Ibn Sina is not new; al-Ghazali articulated it some nine centuries ago.[25]

From this discussion, we see that even though optimism posits a God who is the all-powerful and exclusive creator, its raises doubts about God's freedom by subjecting his will to reason. As troubling as this might be for divine voluntarists, it need not disconcert us too much. After all, as mentioned earlier, advocates of divine voluntarism themselves usually fall into the paradox of expecting God to be rational enough to carry out what he has predestined. In simpler terms, this means that God is personal and works with us in ways that we can understand, at least to some degree.

3. Free-Will Theodicies

Free-will theodicy shares with best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicies the conviction that God has a good reason for bringing forth a world in which evil occurs. However, it departs from them by admitting libertarian freedom in either of two ways.

First, modern Christian process theodicy posits a metaphysical limitation to God's power, which approaches the ancient dualisms of Zoroastrianism and Manicheism. God is not omnipotent in the sense that he could control every aspect of the universe, even if he wanted to. Instead, God is metaphysically confined to persuading — and in no way controlling — the ever-evolving universe toward the goods of greater intensity, complexity, and harmony.[26] Process theodicy relieves God of considerable responsibility for evil in the world because God is only doing what he can within the process metaphysic. However, the radical limitation of God's power to the point that God may not be able to bring the world to good ends denies Christian, not to mention Muslim, convictions about God's control of the future.[27]

In the second and more common way that free-will theodicies introduce libertarian freedom, God is not limited metaphysically. Instead, God chooses to limit his own power and freedom to make room for the freedom of creatures. The remaining free-will theodicies I discuss operate within this framework.

Christians, including Mennonites, have often resorted to what Marilyn McCord Adams calls a 'free-fall' version of the free-will theodicy. In this view, the great goods of human dignity and freedom led God to create humankind with free moral choice. God then respected human dignity by not interfering in human affairs. However, humans freely disobeyed God and fell from their originally good state. In the Augustinian account of this 'free-fall' theodicy, God set up a system of retributive justice in which humans earn rewards and punishments for their deeds and so ultimately deserve heaven or hell. In some modern free-fall versions, humans are not subjected to retributive justice but are left to reap the natural consequences of their acts.[28]

The moral intention behind free-fall theodicies is to encourage adults to take responsibility. The confident are energized to pursue their reward, and the threat of hell scares the lazy into doing good. However, the heavy load of responsibility may paralyze the fearful and the suffering, and it may create bewilderment and resentment when God does not rescue people out of respect for human dignity, even in the face of the most horrific evils. These difficulties with free-fall theodices have precipitated further Christian reflection in modern times.

British philosopher John Hick levels a sharp critique against the Augustinian theodicy, which employs the Neoplatonic notion of privation to explain how evil emerged out of God's good creation. Evil does not come from God or an independent metaphysical principle. Rather, it is a privation, which is fundamentally an absence and lacks an efficient cause, and it occurs when something ceases to be what God created it to be. Hick responds that evil as 'privation' does not stand up to the human experience of evil as a positive demonic power, and he wonders how sin could arise spontaneously out of nothing in good creatures. Moreover, he wonders, why did Augustinian's God bring the world into existence even though he knew in advance that it would go wrong?[29]

Adams expands on this moral objection when she argues that free-fall theodicies place far too much responsibility on Adam and Eve for instigating 'horrendous evils', which is Adams's term for tragedy or pointless evil. Free-fall theodicies make a moral appeal to adult responsibility-taking — either to take charge of one's fate or to act well enough to attain heaven. However, Adams believes that God's relation to humans is more like that of parents to small children than that of adults one to another. Along these lines, she likens the free-fall account to putting a three-year-old alone in a gas-filled room with a stove and telling him not to play with the stove's brightly colored knobs. Who is to bear the most blame here when the child blows the room up: the parent or the child? Obviously the parent. So, Adams argues, the great destruction wrought by horrendous evils far exceeds what retributive justice can rectify by meting out reward and punishment, and God must shoulder full responsibility for having set up such a world as this in the first place.[30]

In the Islamic tradition, the foremost advocates of a free-will theodicy are the Mu'tazili theologians. Mu'tazili theology passed off the scene in the Sunni world in the thirteenth century, but it was carried on by the Shi'ites, especially in the work of the fourteenth-century Twelver scholar ’Allama Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 726/1325).[31] Mu’tazilism has also enjoyed a revival among some Sunnis in the last century.

In the Mu’tazili theodicy, the reason God created human beings is to give them opportunity to earn reward. In line with this, God granted humans libertarian freedom, and he established a retributive order of justice. The Mu’tazilis also affirm that God must do the best (*aslah*) for his servants in matters of religion, and some theologians, such as ’Allama al-Hilli, extend God’s obligation to do the best even to worldly affairs. Although humans are to blame for evil, the Mu’tazili free-will order entails a great deal of innocent suffering and pain, some of which God produces for the educational ends of testing, warning, and deterring. Because of this, God must compensate innocent sufferers in this world or in the hereafter.[32]

Ash‘ari theologians reject the Mu’tazili theodicy for giving humans the ability to create their own acts and thereby violate God’s uniqueness as the sole creator in the universe. They also tell a story of three brothers to show that the Mu’tazili God is not perfectly fair. One brother died young, and the other two reached maturity. One of these two became a believer, the other did not. God gave the believer a high rank in Paradise. The brother who died young received a lower rank in Paradise because he had not performed the good deeds of his brother. When the brother in the lower rank complained, God told him that he had taken his life early for his benefit because he would have become an unbeliever. At this, the third brother cried out from the depths of the Fire, asking why God had not taken his life before he fell into unbelief, for that would have been of benefit to him too.[33] As is evident from the story, our experience of life does not easily confirm a doctrine of God’s absolute fairness. In reply to this story, later Mu’tazilis explained either that God took the life of the one brother young out of pure grace, not divine obligation, or that the good of the community required his early death but not the early death of the unbelieving older brother.[34]

Returning now to the Christian tradition, John Hick tries to overcome the moral difficulties in free-fall theodicies with a ‘soul-making’ theodicy. He begins with the developmental views of human nature found in Irenaeus (d. ca. 202) and Schleiermacher (d. 1834) and explains that God created human beings initially immature and at a distance from God. God created this world of sin and suffering as a ‘vale of soul-making’ in which God’s aim is human growth into the mature perfection of Christ and “the bringing of many sons to glory” (cf. Hebrews 2:10). Evil is instrumental in bringing about the final goal of a humanity perfected through the struggle of this world. Whether in this life or in the life to come, every human being will eventually respond to God’s love in freedom. This is the great good justifying God’s creation of this present world.[35]

In free-fall and soul-making theodicies, God chose to limit the scope of his power and make room for human agents with libertarian freedom. Even though human beings thus constitute a second source of agency in the universe and might be blamed for some of its evils, God remains responsible for having created this order in the first place. The Mu’tazili notion that God does the best for us and the Mu’tazili system of divine compensations show a concern to reduce the divine harshness entailed in this fact. This concern is all the more evident in Hick’s vision of universal salvation. Nonetheless, Adams still criticizes Hick’s God for being a bad educator who subjects some people to horrors that irreparably damage their ability to grow toward God in this life.[36] Moreover, it is unclear whether Hick’s God, who always leaves humans completely free from determinative causes, is consistent with the traditional Christian, and Muslim, hope that God will eventually intervene to set things right.

Adams makes this hope central to her own thought on evil. One of her points of contention is that retribution is not the only or even primary value category present in the Christian tradition. In addition to the metaphysical value of ‘being’ that prevailed in medieval theology, she argues that the Bible is filled with concern for purity and defilement and honor and shame. It also includes aesthetic elements in the irony of its plots, in God giving order to primal chaos, and in the beauty of the divine light. Ultimately, there are the goods of beatific vision, intimacy with God, and divine compassion and identification with humanity — as in the Christian doctrine of Incarnation — that overcome the horrible evils that humans suffer.[37]

Adams maintains that she does not intend to develop a theodicy. She says that it is too much to expect that victims of horrendous evils should ever find these evils reasonable enough to gladly go through them again.[38] Such evils by definition defy the ability of our conceptual frameworks to domesticate them as necessary to some greater good. Nonetheless, Adams does propose that this destabilizing function of evil is in fact “a *good* thing because it jolts us out of our complacency and propels us to search for deeper, more complicated truths” (italics mine).[39] Here, she comes closer to a theodicy than she is willing to admit, and she is not far from Hick's soul-making version in giving evil a growth-inducing role. However, she goes beyond Hick to press the soteriological claim that only God can overcome the extraordinary damage that horrendous evils cause. As she colorfully puts it, "Horrors smash Humpty Dumpty so badly that only God can put him back together again."[40]

In order to allow God to causally determine some things so as to save the world from total destruction, Adams sacrifices the values of absolute human dignity and libertarian freedom often found in free-fall and soul-making theodicies. Nonetheless, she still retains a measure of free-will for her replacement values of relationship and love.[41] She also ventures that a 'partial reason' why God put us in a world such as this is that "God *loves* material creation" and desires to interact and join with other relational beings who have the capacity to love and be loved. This love led God to enter even the creation himself in the Incarnation. Shifting to soteriology, Adams explains that by suffering evil at the hands of his creation, God endowed participation in horrendous evils with a "good aspect" that enables participants in such evils not to wish their experiences away and to accept their lives as fundamentally good.[42]

I have given Adams the last word in this survey because I as a Christian find her approach the most helpful. Her proposals that only God can overcome horrendous evils and that God created a world such as this out of love fit well with the dramatic character of the Bible and Christian experience. However, Adams's work is problematic on at least one point. Her conviction that we never get beyond the status of unaccountable young children in our relationship with God leads naturally to her belief in universal salvation.[43] For Adams, God in his power saves all of us because none of us ever reaches an age of accountability. However, the Christian tradition, and especially the Mennonite tradition, has usually held that God in his love created us to grow beyond the level of young children. Some of us are held accountable before God for at least some things. Yet, this creates a further problem: How does this measure of human accountability relate to God's grace and unique ability to save? I doubt that this can be explained neatly, given the personal character of our relationship to God. Possibly, the ratio of God's saving intervention to human freedom varies according to where we find ourselves in the love story that God is writing with us and through us in history.

Concluding Thoughts

Adams does not claim to provide but a partial answer to the problem of evil, and as with other answers, it may make unredeemed tragedy worse when pronounced inappropriately, and it may prove inadequate in the long run. However, inadequate answers to the problem of evil do not invalidate the search for better solutions. To give up the search for meaning in tragedy is to give up on God and the goodness of life. The difficulty of the search keeps us humble, but the search itself is a sign that we believe that life is fundamentally worth living.

In this paper, I have tried to show that Christians and Muslims have faced similar philosophical problems and produced a similar range of thought in the search to understand God and evil. Each tradition has experimented with divine voluntarism, optimism, and free-will theodicies. Despite our different beliefs about how God intervenes to deal with evil, we share similar challenges affirming the rationality of life under God in the face of senselessness and tragedy.

In closing, I suggest that a fruitful line of further inquiry would be comparing how we have made sense of particular tragedies that are central to our religious traditions. For Mennonite Christians, the obvious place to begin is the death of Jesus Christ. For Shi'ah Muslims, I presume that it would be the martyrdom of Husayn.

Notes

[1] Leo Hartshorn, "God and the reality of evil," *The Mennonite*, November 13, 2001, 6-7 (quote on 7).

[2] See the critiques of Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 46-54, 61-67, 155; and Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1991), 235-51, and passim.

[3] Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1973), 144, makes this point well: "Love cannot resign itself to the senselessness of suffering and destruction. It cannot 'break itself of the habit' of inquiring about people who are beyond help."

[4] Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab nihayatu 'l-iqdam fi 'ilmi 'l-kalam*, ed. with English trans, Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University, 1934), 404 (Arabic). Death dates of Muslim scholars supplied in the text are given first according to the Islamic Hijri calendar and then according to the Gregorian calendar.

[5] For the Ash'ari views, see Peter Antes, "The First Aš'arites' Conception of Evil and the Devil," in *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, Tehran Branch, 1977), 177-89; Mohammed Yusoff Hussain, "Al-Ash'ari's Discussion of the Problem of Evil," *Islamic Culture* 64.1 (1990): 25-38; and G. Legenhausen, "Notes

towards an Ash‘arite Theodicy,” *Religious Studies* 24 (1988): 257-66.

[6] On Calvin, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 217-32. The medieval theologian Duns Scotus (d. 1308) also held a strongly voluntarist view of God. For this see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Medieval Philosophy: From Augustine to Duns Scotus* (1950; Reprint, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 529-34.

[7] I have adopted the vocabulary of ‘libertarian freedom’ and ‘compatibilist freedom’ from Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 1998), 33-35. Some philosophers use different terms to refer to libertarian freedom. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 30, speaks of ‘significant’ freedom, while Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1999), 178, speaks of ‘incompatibilist’ freedom. See also Thomas P. Flint, “Providence and predestination,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997), 569-76. Neo-Thomists are particularly concerned to configure the compatibilist divine-human relation in order to make room for some kind of authentic freedom. For a sketch of recent attempts by David Burrell and Katherine Tanner, see Adams, 66-69. See also David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1993), who wrestles with this problem at length in dialogue with the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious traditions.

[8] I owe this insight to Adams, 190, but I extrapolate it beyond what Adams considers.

[9] J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” *Mind* 64 (1955):200-12, explores this paradox insightfully in somewhat different terms as the ‘paradox of omnipotence’.

[10] Adams, 17-20, 179, and 190.

[11] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1966), 45-66. This description of Neoplatonism based on Lovejoy has been augmented from Adams, 139-40, and John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1977), 40-43, 49-50.

[12] Lovejoy, 213 and passim. See also Adams, 63-64, and Thomas Aquinas on evil in *Summa Theologica* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963), 1a. 44-49 (8:107-47).

[13] Lovejoy, 210-11.

[14] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 198.

[15] See my thesis, “An Islamic Theodicy: Ibn Taymiyya on the Wise Purpose of God, Human Agency, and Problems of Evil and Justice” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, UK, 2002), 237-44, and 276 n. 73.

[16] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-ma‘rifa, n.d.), 4:258-259 (at the end of “Kitab al-tawhid wa al-tawakkul”).

[17] J. Meric Pessagno, “The uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought,” *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 59-82.

[18] For the wide impact of Ibn ‘Arabi on Sufism in the Sunni world, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ‘Arabi, The Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993), 1-18. Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought is also an important source for the Twelver Shi‘i Hikma-i Ilahi school of Isfahan associated with the name Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640). For this, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1985), 217.

[19] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 33-44, 289-97.

[20] *Ibid.*, 289-309.

[21] Lovejoy, 39-66, 82-98, 156-63, 315-16.

[22] *Ibid.*, 67-73.

[23] *Ibid.*, 73-82. Augmented from Hick, 93-96.

[24] Shams C. Inati, *The Problem of Evil: Ibn Sînâ's Theodicy* (Binghamton, NY: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 2000), 127-73, quote on 147.

[25] Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ar. ed. of *Tahafut al-falasifa* and English translation by Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1997), 56-78 (Third Question).

[26] David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976), 275-310.

[27] This problem of divine power in process theology and other modern theology is treated at length in Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University, 1988). See also Adams, 78-80, 159-61.

[28] Adams, 33-49. For a theodicy in which humans reap the natural consequences of their acts, see Swinburne, 196-201.

[29] Hick, 38-69, 265-71.

[30] Adams, 36-41, 190. Hick, 69, makes the same point less forcefully.

[31] For 'Allama al-Hilli's Mu'tazili-style thought on divine justice, see Sabine Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 726/1325)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1991), 99-141.

[32] Margaretha T. Heemskerk, *Suffering in Mu'tazilite Theology: 'Abd al-Jabbar's Teaching on Pain and Divine Justice* (Leiden: Brill 2000), 142-91, especially 151-53, 178 and 191. For 'Allama al-Hilli on God's obligation to do the best for humans in worldly affairs, see Schmidtke, 109-15.

[33] On the history of this story among the Ash'aris, see Rosalind W. Gwynne, "Al-Jubba'i, al-Ash'ari and the Three Brothers: The Uses of Fiction," *The Muslim World* 75 (July-Oct. 1985): 132-61.

[34] Schmidtke, 115-16.

[35] Hick, 201-386. Hick also draws into his framework the *felix culpa* noted by Aquinas and employed by later Catholic theologians. This is the notion that human sin gave opportunity for the good of God's redemption, which is a much greater good than no sin at all. This is found in the following lines that have been part of the Roman Catholic liturgy for the evening before Easter since at least the seventh century, "O truly necessary sin of Adam, which is cancelled by Christ's death! O happy fault (*felix culpa*) which merited such and so great a redeemer!" (Text quoted with slight changes from Hick, 244 n. 1, see also 97-98, 107-14, 176-77, 244, 364). For a 'soul-making' theodicy worked out in a context of world religions, see Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 2000).

[36] Adams, 52-53.

[37] Adams, 86-139, 161-77.

[38] Although Adams does not draw theodicies out of most of the value frameworks that she identifies in the biblical texts, her discussions do suggest directions that such theodicies could take. In looking at honor and shame, for example, Adams elaborates how in Exodus 3-15 God was initially of no reputation before Pharaoh or even with the Children of Israel but then won "an extended game of challenge and riposte" in the course of visiting the ten plagues upon Egypt. God worked this game so that in the end He could "strut His stuff" by disposing of Pharaoh and his chariots in the Reed Sea (114-19). The theodicy implied in this story is that evil and the ensuing drama it provoked was necessary for God to show His power and thereby garner praise from His

client Israel. It may be objected that God thus requires our human misery to give Him opportunity to show off His power. While this may indeed be morally problematic, an explicit theodicy of this kind does occur in the New Testament. Jesus explains to his disciples that a certain man was born blind not because he or his parents had sinned but "that God's works might be revealed in him." Jesus then gave the man his sight, and this provoked an ordeal affording Jesus the opportunity to get the better of the religious leaders of his day (John 9).

[39] Adams, 203-04, quote on 204.

[40] *Ibid.*, 205.

[41] *Ibid.*, 157. Adams suggests that if God determines some things causally, this is "no more an insult to our dignity than a mother's changing a baby's diaper is to the baby" (157).

[42] Adams, 165-68.

[43] This is most apparent in Adams's argument against various kinds of free-fall theodicies, including the notion of a 'mild hell' for those who freely reject God. Rather, she understands that God will be good to each person "by insuring each a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole, and by defeating his/her participation in horrors within the context, not merely of the world as a whole, but of that individual's life" (32-55, quote on 55).

Public Orthodoxy and Civic Forbearance: The Challenges of Modern Law for Religious Minority Groups

A. James Reimer

Introduction

In modern societies there exists the fact of religious diversity — a diversity of religious groups living within one regional, national, and global jurisdiction. Many of these diverse groups each make universal and exclusive truth claims with religious, social, economic, political, and legal ramifications. Frequently these various universal and exclusive truth claims clash with each other. The social, economic, political, and legal institutions of a society can never be said to be neutral (ideologically value-free) but are always determined by some kind of public orthodoxy. Given this picture, how ought these mutually exclusive religious groups within a society relate to each other? How can civil institutions be so conceived as to allow for the peaceful co-existence of these groups,

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including religious minority groups, without any of them compromising their fundamental convictions?

I write from the perspective of a Christian, and within Christianity as a member of a minority group: the Radical Reformation tradition known as Anabaptist-Mennonite. Several factors make this a fruitful vantage point from which to address the issues raised above: (1) the Anabaptist radicals of the sixteenth-century Reformation were nonconformist dissidents who made truth-claims concerning their understanding of the core Christian message which were in conflict with mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, and for which they were severely persecuted; (2) as a persecuted minority group within a society defined by Christendom orthodoxy, the Anabaptists lobbied the ruling authorities for what they called religious freedom and "religious tolerance" — although what they meant by freedom and toleration did not mean what it has come to mean in the modern period, as I will elaborate below; (3) Mennonites as a "tolerated" minority group, with a continuous historical identity from the sixteenth century to the present, have been able to survive uncomfortably on the periphery of societies shaped by "public orthodoxies" often in conflict with Mennonite belief and practice.

Modernity and the Illusion of Pluralism

On the most superficial level, there is truth to the claim that pluralism, diversity, fragmentation, and loss of cohesion are the fundamental mark of modern and postmodern societies. Upon more careful analysis, however, one finds this to be an illusion. For, as Canadian philosopher George Grant and others have persuasively argued, we live in an increasingly hegemonous world in which the values of globalization and modern technology (technical or instrumental reason) subtly but relentlessly erode traditional values and beliefs.[1] Although I consider the homogenizing threat of modern technology to be greater for traditional religious beliefs and values than that of religious pluralism, here I will concentrate on the challenges of pluralism for Christianity and other major religions. So-called "postmodernity" and the accompanying religious pluralism are predominantly Western phenomena, which do not adequately describe many non-Western societies, even though with increasing globalization no society can escape entirely the challenge of pluralism. It is not at all clear even in the West that the concepts of postmodernity and pluralism accurately describe our societies with their underlying legal, economic, technological, and military assumptions.

In March 2002 I had the opportunity to hear Jon Levenson, Alfred A. List Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard Divinity School, address members of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, on "Religious Pluralism and Public Orthodoxy."[2] Levenson introduced us to the debate between John Hick and Gavin D'Costa on the possibility or impossibility of a pluralist view of religions. Let me present the argument of D'Costa and Hick on the issue before moving on to Levenson's position and subsequently my own.

In an 1996 article, Gavin D'Costa repudiates the three-fold typology of approaches to inter-religious discourse that he had previously (in 1983) promoted: exlusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.[3] *Exclusivism* is the view that only one religion is true and all others are false. At the other extreme is *pluralism*, which claims that no one religion can claim absolute truth and that all major religions have partial truth: "all religions are viewed as more or less equally true and more or less equally valid paths to salvation" (D'Costa, 224). In the middle are the *inclusivists*, who try to have it both ways, by holding that one religion is the only definitively true one though other religions hold partial truths but are incomplete in their truth claims. The latter ends up usually arguing for the truth of Christianity as a fulfilment of other religions. The whole of nineteenth-century liberal Protestant theology, with its interest in the evolution of consciousness and history of religions — from Schleiermacher to Hegel to von Harnack and Troeltsch — was committed to religious pluralism while at the same time defending the superiority if not absoluteness of Christianity. Mohammad Legenhausen, in *Islam and Religious Pluralism*[4] helpfully summarizes that theology in its movement from liberal Protestantism (Schleiermacher, Hegel) to modern religious pluralism (Dilthey, Troeltsch, Toynbee). Despite their concern for pluralism and tolerance of other religions, Christianity virtually always ended up being the superior religion (Legenhausen, 13-28). I will have more to say about Legenhausen's position below.

D'Costa by 1996 had experienced a kind of conversion, fully rejecting this earlier typology, and now argues against John Hick and others that there is no such thing as religious pluralism: "*pluralism must always logically be a form of exclusivism and that nothing called pluralism really exists*" (D'Costa, 225). His argument, which he holds to be true for Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews as well as Christians, goes as follows. (1) Pluralism and inclusivism are but subtypes of exclusivism — that is, the logic of exclusivism explains the way the other two work; (2) Pluralists are always exclusivists in some sense. They of necessity apply substantive tradition-specific criteria for truth, although they may differ as to what those criteria are. Were they not to do so, they would have no way of distinguishing between true and false claims, which they want to do. D'Costa illustrates his argument with reference to two forms of arguments for pluralism: the philosophical pluralism of John Hick and the practical pluralism of Paul Knitter. Hick argues that all religious are different ways to the "Real," a formally empty concept more neutral than "God" or "Nirguna Brahman." The "Real" is devoid of descriptive content and beyond all language. Religions are true to the extent that they "align believers correctly towards the Real, producing an attitude of loving compassion towards one's neighbour and the social and natural environment, thereby breaking down the egocentrism of the believer's life" (D'Costa's interpretation of Hick's position, 227). D'Costa makes a convincing case that Hick's Kantian claim that the "Real" is beyond language and cannot be known ("transcendental agnosticism") is itself an exclusivist claim. D'Costa concludes that "The irony about tolerant pluralism is that it is eventually intolerant towards most forms of orthodox religious belief" (229).

Legenhausen makes a similar point. He calls Hick's position "reductive religious pluralism," and agrees with the criticism that "the neutral pretenses of liberalism are a sham. Despite its claims to neutrality, liberals have their own substantive values and ideals, and a tradition in which these values and ideals have been modified and pursued, often in conflict with religious traditions" (Legenhausen, 9). Legenhausen, who proposes a "non-reductive pluralism" based on Islamic belief, contends that the liberal theological tradition is prejudicial toward, and ultimately intolerant of, traditional religious authority structures (belief systems, laws etc.), and by default gives authority to the liberal state (Legenhausen, 10-11).

Hick's position also contains an exclusivist, pragmatic criterion for truth, which is that religions are true in so far as they contribute to people's turn from self-centeredness and selfish egoism to loving compassion and Reality-centredness (D'Costa, 230). Such pragmatic pluralism, which in the end is also a form of exclusivism, D'Costa finds most blatantly present in Paul Knitter's thought. Knitter's criterion of truth, a way of determining where the divine is truly present, is whether a religion promotes "practical socio-economic, cultural, psychological and spiritual liberation," that is, peace, justice, and goodness. Again, D'Costa shows how the categories of peace, justice, and goodness can never function as formally empty, but are always tradition-specific. Drawing upon the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, D'Costa claims: "there is no such concept and practice as 'justice' without the narrative tradition that defines it and specifies the conditions for pursuing it, and the types of agents that may or may not engage in the pursuit of justice, and the way in which it may relate to other concepts and practices within that narrative" (D'Costa, 231). In short, there is no such type as religious pluralism, strictly speaking; for all religious pluralism is a form of exclusivism.

Jewish theologian Jon Levenson was unequivocal in his support of D'Costa's side in the exchange. For Levenson, pluralism is the notion that there exist societies in which groups with exclusive world views can live together without a public orthodoxy, without some over-riding ideology (religious or otherwise). But there is no such pluralism, and there is no such society. There can be no society without a public orthodoxy of some kind. American democracy, where the notion of religious pluralism has its most ardent defenders, if not its origin, is itself rooted in white, liberal Protestantism, as is Hick's own form of religious pluralism. There is no way of affirming the validity of another religion that is not done on the basis of criteria intrinsic to one's own set of beliefs. Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" is an illustration of this. Hick's pluralism isn't as pluralistic as he thinks, his "axial age" concept does not apply to aboriginal and many other religions. Of the many commands in the Torah, 613 apply to Jews, and only 7 apply universally. Always there is a "public orthodoxy" at work. Everyone who argues for pluralism or diversity is pluralistic only very superficially — deep down they have a public orthodoxy that drives their thought. Hick's view is really a form of liberal Protestant hegemony, one which doesn't like doctrine.

But if every society (and state) has a public orthodoxy of some kind — that is, there is no ideologically neutral society which simply facilitates the co-existence of diverse groups under its jurisdiction, how is public, constitutional law to be fashioned in such a way that allows for the peaceful co-existence of groups with not only exclusive but frequently conflicting truth claims? This is the fundamental conundrum of the D'Costa-Levenson exclusivist position. I will offer my own solution to this dilemma below, but I must first consider the issue of public orthodoxy and modern law.

Public Orthodoxy and Law in Modern and Postmodern Societies

Other than the internal rules (or law[s]) of religious communities, it is in the realm of public law that the fundamental values and beliefs of a society are most clearly entrenched. Here the *modus vivendi* of individuals, minority groups, and dominant cultures with different, even conflicting, truth-claims attempting to co-exist is most succinctly formulated. In *Faith and Order: The Reconciliation of Law and Religion*, Harold J. Berman argues "that the legal order of a society, that is, the formal institutions, structures, rules, and procedures by which it is regulated, is intrinsically connected with the fundamental beliefs concerning the ultimate meaning of life and the ultimate purpose of history, that is, with religious faith."[5] On the deepest level, he maintains, the holy (religion) and the just (law) are united, each is a dimension of the other, but they have a different function: religion challenges existing social and political structures, law stabilizes them (Berman, 4). He defines *law* not just as a body of rules but as "people legislating, adjudicating, administering, negotiating," as "a living process of allocating rights and duties and thereby resolving conflicts and creating channels of cooperation." *Religion*, likewise, is not merely a collection of exercises and doctrines but a "people manifesting a collective concern for the ultimate meaning and purpose of life — it is a shared intuition of and commitment to transcendent values." In sum, "Law helps to give society the structure, the *Gestalt*, it needs to maintain inner cohesion; law fights against anarchy. Religion helps to give society the faith it needs to face the future; religion fights against decadence" (Berman, 3).

What Berman's thesis poses is whether there are some universal elements within law (all law) and within religion (all religion), that provides a basis for diverse groups in a society to co-exist peacefully.

Berman maintains that when law and religion are divorced, law deteriorates into legalism and religion into religiosity. But this is exactly what has happened in modern and postmodern society: law and religion have become divorced. Beginning with the Enlightenment, the disenchantment of the world, and the loss of belief in a natural law grounded in divine law, conventional wisdom has increasingly understood law in purely secular, rational, and instrumental terms, as a means of achieving culturally-specific political, economic, and social ends. Law is seen as devoid of any ultimate purpose and meaning; as purely pragmatic and functionalist (Berman, 6). This is at the heart of the crisis of modernity: religion is relegated to the individual, private sphere and law has lost its legitimacy and sanctity. This crisis is evident in ritual (ceremonial procedures), tradition (the on-goingness of law), authority (written and oral sources of law), and universality (concepts which are valid for all peoples).

For Berman, the four elements are present in all religions and in all legal traditions. They connect the legal order of a society with its religious values, reinforcing the fundamental legal emotions of peoples in every society: "the sense of rights and duties, the claim to an impartial hearing, the aversion to inconsistency in the application of rules, the desire for equality of treatment, the very feeling of fidelity to law and its correlative, the abhorrence of illegality" — in short, "objectivity, impartiality, consistency, equality, fairness" (Berman, 5). Whether these in fact are universally accepted would have to be empirically demonstrated; whether they are universally true would have to be theologically or philosophically argued.

Berman's universalist perspective on law and religion comes from within a culturally- and religiously-specific context: the American way of life. His agenda is clearly the revitalization of American law based on Judeo-Christian values. He decries the privatization of religion and loss of public respect for law in America: the breakdown in the administration of criminal law, inadequate treatment of political crimes, the limited scope and procedures in civil cases (Berman, 15ff). In the United States, traditionally, law received its religious sanctity from Judaism, Christianity, and the "secular religion of the American way of life." In a rather exaggerated claim, Berman says, "in few other legal systems does one find such explicit reliance on divine guidance and divine sanctions and so great a reverence for constitutional appeals to universal standards of justice" (Berman, 19). He cites with approval Robert Bellah's words: "Behind the civil religion [of America] at every point lie Biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death and Rebirth." (Berman, 19, n22).

This is where the Berman analysis — indeed, any understanding of public law as sanctified by religion — runs into its greatest difficulty. More often than not, religion becomes little more than an ideological justification of culturally-specific laws which, although framed in universal terms with noble-sounding sentiments ("objectivity, impartiality, consistency, equality, fairness"), disguise imperial agendas whose legitimacy rests on violence rather than open discourse. Stanley Hauerwas has shown how American democracy as defended by William James and Reinhold Niebuhr presupposes violence.[6] James, the pragmatist, for whom the true source of religion is feelings, considers doctrines or theological formulas "over-beliefs," interesting and important in a derivative sense but speculative. What is important are the effects of religion, not its intrinsic truth claims. In the end religious belief is relegated to the private realm and replaced publicly by the American religion of democracy, religious pluralism, and "fairness." James realized that some violence would be necessary in a society in which most were not saints, but he thought it could be kept at a minimum and on the periphery. What he did not realize is that coercion and even violence exist not on the edges but at the very core of the democratic order that he envisioned. For James, Christianity — with its call for turning the other cheek — was not pragmatic, realistic, and democratic enough and so must be marginalized and privatized. Although Hauerwas does not adequately spell out the logic of violence in Western democratic society, he implies it: it is needed to sustain the illusion of pluralism, individualism, fairness, freedom, and wealth. In short, religious pluralism and democratic tolerance is not nearly as tolerant as it claims to be.

In "What Makes a Society Political?,"[7] Herbert W. Richardson distinguishes between two types of values: teleological and procedural. *Teleological* values are those (as in Berman) which have to do with the ultimate meaning, goals, and purposes of life. *Procedural* values, in contrast, are purely functional — how a society orders itself. Parallel to this distinction is the difference between what he calls nonpolitical-monolithic societies and political-pluralistic ones. A society that is *political* "seeks to maintain itself structurally pluralistic by aiming, insofar as possible, to multiply the number and variety of willings within it, and to compromise the various willings within it through a political process that becomes, symbolically, the 'head' of the community." A *nonpolitical* society aims "insofar as possible, to dissolve the plurality of willings into a single general will which is then symbolized as the will of the leader or party" (Richardson, 101).

Richardson argues for a political process in which a diversity of "willings" can become a cohesive community in which "the clash, composition, and creativity of many wills" seek and reach "a compromise that is different from what any one or even all of them specifically propose" (Richardson, 103). Central to his thesis is that any political society must have *intrinsic authority* (people freely obeying laws because they consider them their own and believe them to be right); *justice* (equitable ordering of a society such that the essential dignity of all is recognized); and *politics* (differentiating and distributing of power among individuals and groups in society, and then putting into motion a process of conflict and debate that aims or ends in compromise). He continues with a discussion of the three basic, classic rights of modern western societies, which he also thinks are natural or inalienable: freedom (freedom of conscience before God), equality (political, not necessarily economic), and brotherhood (loyalty to, and solidarity with, one another). What such a pluralistic society requires is a poly-consciousness in which each individual and group develops a differentiated plurality within himself/itself and thus has empathy for the other.

The only religious element essential to such a society is a belief in transcendence, which in the American context has taken the following forms: (1) from the Hebraic tradition, the belief in a transcendent God, which relativizes the sovereignty of every earthly ruler; (2) from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the notion that human beings have a transcendent, super-natural destiny, relativizing every earthly social order; (3) from the Protestant tradition, the belief in the freedom and privacy of the individual conscience, which preserves the uniqueness and dignity of every person and guarantees his/her right to a "private psychic sphere" (Richardson, 117).

The difficulty with Richardson's proposal is that in actual states the separation of so-called "teleological" and "procedural" (the message and the medium) is impossible to achieve. The procedural values of justice, freedom, equality, brotherhood, and transcendence are not just empty, formal concepts but are substantive and always filled with tradition-specific content. Richardson as much as admits this when he draws on Hebraic, Orthodox-Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions to define the transcendence necessary for the political society he has in mind. Legenhausen has it exactly right:

> The liberal claim is procedural: differences of all kinds, including religious differences, are to be permitted unless they interfere with the rights and freedoms of others. Authority is taken away from religious institutions by liberals not because the liberal denies the claim to religious knowledge advanced on behalf of the religious

> institution, but as a practical method to resolve conflicting claims to this sort of knowledge and authority. The religious pluralist goes further by claiming that religious truth is to be found in various religious traditions. *Hence, the institutions of no single tradition can claim exclusive knowledge on which to base their authority. Authority then falls by default into the hands of the liberal state*. (Legenhausen, 10-11; italics mine)

Forbearance as a Religious and Civil Concept

If D'Costa, Levenson, and Legenhausen are right, then how do we move from a situation of an intolerance, which manifests itself in persecution, oppression, and violence against those that disagree with us, to one of peaceful co-existence? I propose that the concept of "forbearance" and "concord," as introduced into the Christian vocabulary by the fourth-century theologian Lactantius, is a more helpful concept than "toleration" in inter-religious dialogue, relationships, and civil life. The case for religious pluralism and toleration is not first made in the modern period as is frequently assumed but was already argued for by the Ancients. Diocletian (c.e. 284-305), the last Roman Emperor to systematically persecute the Christians in the years c.e. 303-305, did so because they were not tolerant enough. They, unlike the other religions in the Empire, including the Jews, were intent on proselytizing. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser demonstrates how the policy of religious pluralism and tolerance was in fact more consistent with a polytheistic state under the Tetrarchy and Diocletian than later under the monotheistic state of Constantine.[8]

The theologian who spelled this out most clearly was Lactantius, author of *Divine Institutes*, a mentor to Constantine and tutor of Constantine's son. Under Gallienus (c.e. 253-268) Christian worship had been unofficially tolerated as part of a pluralistic culture, and Christians had begun to commingle with others in palace, government, army, and classroom without having to participate in religious rituals in worship of the Roman gods. Lactantius himself was given a chair in the imperial court. His vision, as articulated in the *Divine Institutes*, entailed Christianizing the Roman Empire. The inner logic of that vision, although not fully understood by him, was the unifying of the Empire under a set of "Christian" laws ("Christian" now understood in new ways).

Drawing on traditional Greek and Roman literature and philosophy, Lactantius's political theology calls for a policy of forbearance rather than toleration. *Toleration* assumes a situation in which different religious groups co-exist within a "pluralistic" state, with little hope or desire of converting others, let alone society as a whole. Since there is no such thing as a neutral pluralism and ideology of tolerance, such a world is always precarious and can erupt into persecution of one group or another. So-called "toleration" was the ideology of the Empire up to the time of Constantine. A policy of official pluralism, based on polytheistic political theologies, always brought an element of legal chaos, and although allegedly the Roman state was one of tolerance, the Emperors up to and including Diocletian were in fact quite ready to use brutal force against groups whose religious practices threatened fidelity to the laws (Digeser, 120). The drive toward monotheism tended to coincide with attempts to unify and centralize the legal system, although Diocletian tried unsuccessfully to ground his systematization of law polytheistically. His successor Gelerius, in his 311 Edict of Toleration, officially made Christianity a legal religion for the first time, even though he himself objected to Christianity and the laws that Christians created for themselves.

Forbearance, as Lactantius envisioned it, allowed for the co-existence of different groups but with hopes of converting the other and even the state as such, assuming one's own religion to be the superior or the true one. In the Diocletian context, this meant that even though Christianity was officially considered reprehensible, it ought to be forborne without using force against it. But since, for Lactantius, Christianity was the superior religion, there was an intrinsic drive to convert others and to Christianize the whole. The critical point, however, was that the Christian state should be achieved by persuasion, not by force. Persecution of others and the use of force in religious matters was against natural law and violated the very essence of what it meant to be religious. Here Lactantius draws on Tertullian, who was the first to use the expression "freedom of religion." This vision of a state based on Christian monotheistic assumptions is what Lactantius tried to convince Constantine of, as a basis for his constitution. Lactantius appears to have thought, and Digeser shares this opinion, that Constantine's state approximated this vision of forbearance and concord. Digeser disputes the twentieth-century assumption that a universalizing religion (like Christianity) is fundamentally an intolerant one as distinct from tolerant polytheistic religions. The early

Roman state was not particularly tolerant, but there were ways of conceiving a universal *Christian* state that refrained from violence and practiced forbearance of other religions, such as that of Lactantius, whose position "may have been exceptional among contemporary Christian theologians [in contrast, for instance, to Eusebius], but it was concordant with the thinking of emperor Constantine, whose court he joined in 310." Furthermore, says Digeser, "nothing in the definitions of tolerance or concord requires a state to allow everything religious that it finds harmful. Even the more liberal constitutions can justify some sanctions against religion: the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but this guarantee does not protect every practice or action that is called religious" (Digeser, 119). In Digeser's rather over-sympathetic view, Constantine fostered a milieu of religious liberty, as reflected in the Edict of Milan (313), which "granted both to Christians and to all persons the freedom . . . to follow whatever religion each one wished . . . in order that 'no cult may seem to be impaired'" (Digeser, 122).

Digeser is too soft on Constantine's later disparagement (after 324) of traditional religious cults and his establishing of Christianity as the official religion. Within the earlier policy of religious liberty traditional cults were not criticized; with the later policy of concord there was movement toward forbearance toward these cults, with the intention of converting them and achieving religious unity in the end. The shift to a policy of concord is reflected by Constantine in a letter to the eastern provinces in 324, in which he expressed the hope that erring ones will be restored to the "sweetness of fellowship" but without the use of force. It is a conviction that, according to Digeser, Constantine held to the end of his life, though this is hard to reconcile with his treatment of Jews and the harsh measures against other dissenting groups that increased incrementally in the post-Constantinian period.

Lactantius's vision of a new Christian-informed civil constitution and set of laws based on natural laws, themselves grounded in Divine law, was actualized in the life and policies of the first Christian Emperor. The nature and understanding of citizenship, and of one's duties to the state, changed profoundly under Constantine. Whereas traditionally citizens demonstrated their loyalty to the state by performing ritual worship to the gods, now they did so by their allegiance to the Christian God. Prayer for the protection of Rome replaced sacrifice to the gods but, most critically, the protection of the new state involved the identification of "Christ" and the "Sword."[9]

According to James Carroll, up to the time of Constantine Christianity was allegedly a threat to polytheistic pluralism and tolerance in Roman society. With Constantine and the official recognition of Christianity on the basis of the Edict of Milan, forces were set in motion that would eventually replace that very pluralism and tolerance with a Christian hegemony. This hegemony, says Carroll, was achieved by the identification of post and beam, cross and sword. Whatever good intentions Constantine may have had about not using violence or force in religious matters, at the point where Christianity was identified as the theological underpinning of the Empire's destiny, military defence of the "homeland" became a moral and ethical obligation also for Christians, and *particularly* for Christians.

The proof of this came in subsequent years with the development of the Just War theory and its replacement of the non-violent love ethic of Jesus and his early followers. Already Constantine had moved against the Jews and the schismatic "heretics." Very soon thereafter harsh measures were taken against other religions. Between 325 and 381 State and Church became allies against heretics. By 390-392 pagan temples were closed. In 420 Augustine, the father of the Just War principles, gave his approval to coercive-repressive measures against Christian dissenters. Whereas much earlier, Christians had been excluded from the army, by 436 non-Christians were excluded from it.

Proposal: Forbearance as a Basis for Dialogue

We come back now to our original questions. How ought groups with exclusive belief and value systems relate to each other? How might civil institutions and laws be so conceived as to foster peaceful co-existence between diverse and even mutually-exclusive groups under their jurisdictions?

Despite the misuse of the concepts of "forbearance" and "concord" in the Constantinian and post-Constantinian eras of Western history, it is these concepts which, better than "religious pluralism" and "tolerance," facilitate both inter-religious relations and the treatment of minority groups within a society by the state and its laws. *Forbearance* begins not with a position of neutrality but presupposes both individually and corporately some "orthodoxy," yet forbears others who differ from the orthodox position. That is, it allows them to exist alongside and within the jurisdiction of the orthodox without persecution, coercion, and violence. This stance is based on the conviction that religious belief and life — the realm of ultimate meaning, values, and purpose (what Richardson calls the "teleological") — can never be coerced. *Concord* is the state of such peaceful co-existence but with an openness to the other, and the hope of persuading the other non-coercively of what it ("orthodoxy") holds to be not only particularly but universally true. Such truth claims shape the internal structure of communities but also the external organization and laws of a society (what Richardson calls the "procedural" but wrongly considers non-teleological).

Forbearance and concord, I propose, are applicable within both what Richardson labels political-pluralistic (multiple willings) and nonpolitical-monolithic (singly willing) societies and political systems. I doubt, however, whether any societies are altogether unpolitical. Rather, societies might be said to differ to the extent to which they foster greater or lesser diversity within their domain. Regardless, the concepts of forbearance and concord as articulated above are relevant to all forms of political systems.

What, more concretely, would such forbearance and concord look like? I answer by drawing on my own Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition's historical experience. According to Legenhausen,

> Most liberals agree that liberalism is to be traced to the aftermath of the Reformation. Freedom of conscience in religious matters came first, and was then extended to other areas of opinion. So, tolerance of different opinions about religion lies at the very foundations of political liberalism, and religious pluralism may be viewed as a very late arrival which seeks to provide a theological basis for this tolerance. (Legenhausen, 7)

My tradition, which in the sixteenth century called for religious freedom and freedom of conscience, was in some respects a forerunner of the modern liberal tradition.[10] Here I would argue that the line from the plea for toleration by the Radical Reformers to modern liberalism and pluralism is not as direct as I might have suggested in earlier writings or as Legenhausen implies in the above quotation.

In his 1539 *Foundations of Christian Doctrine,*[11] Menno Simons (1496-1561) appeals to the Magistrates for toleration of his small group of persecuted Anabaptists and exhorts them to be true to their calling (Simons, 190-206). He begins with a description of diversity that sounds as if it were made today: ". . . there being so many and various congregations, churches, and sects all calling themselves by the name of the Lord. There are Roman Catholics or papists, Lutherans, Zwinglians, erring sects, and the Christians who are revilingly called Anabaptists. Likewise in former times among the Jews there were the Chasidim, Zadikim, Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees, etc., . . ." He continues: "The pious everywhere have had to suffer much from the impious. . . . And this even though they are created by the same God, have one common natural origin, boast the same Christ, and in the day of judgment meet the same Judge" (Simons, 190).

The Anabaptists were a persecuted minority within the context of Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian orthodoxy. They suffered for their particular understanding of the Christian gospel. Central to that understanding was that Jesus' message was one of love and nonviolence, and, consequently, the use of violence could never be justified to enforce religious belief. Says Menno: "Antichrist rules through hypocrisy and lies, with force and sword, but Christ rules by patience with His Word and Spirit. He has no other sword or saber" (Simons, 190). Brothers and sisters in Christ should treat each other with love, patience, and forbearance, even as God treats us with such forbearance and compassion. But magistrates too are under such obligation: "Therefore it becomes you, lords and princes, since you boast of the same Christ, Gospel, redemption, and kingdom, no longer by your mandates and powers to obstruct the passage of the people of God to the eternal promised land" (Simons, 191). While magistrates have the duty "to chastise and punish" the wicked, they are to do so without bloodshed: "Your task is to do justice between a man and his neighbor, to deliver the oppressed out of the hand of the oppressor; also to restrain by reasonable means, that is, without tyranny and bloodshed, manifest deceivers who so miserably lead poor helpless souls by hundreds and thousands into destruction. . . . In this way, in all love, without force, violence, and blood, you may enlarge, help, and protect the kingdom of God with gracious consent and permission, with wise counsel and a pious, unblamable life" (Simons, 191).

These early Anabaptists in their emphasis on religious freedom and freedom of conscience were *not* modern liberals and pluralists. They had strong doctrinal and ethical convictions about was true and what was false, right and wrong; and it was on the basis of these convictions, for which they were willing to die, that they appealed to each other and to the ruling authorities to be patient, forbearing, and non-violent. Their appeal to conscience —a dominant theme among Anabaptists — was not anthropocentric (as in modern liberalism) but theocentric: "Do not usurp the judgment and kingdom of Christ, for He alone is the ruler of the conscience, and besides Him there is none other. Let Him be your emperor in this matter and His holy Word your edict, and you will soon have enough of storming and slaying. You must hearken to God above the emperor, and obey God's Word more than that of the emperor" (Simons, 204). Here, then, is the divine ground for the patience and forbearance of the other that, I propose, is the basis for our dialogue.

Notes

[1] See my *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, co-published with Herald Press, 2001). See especially "Part One: The Crisis of Modernity": 21–158.

[2] Levenson gave a public lecture on "Resurrection in the Torah?" and later engaged members of the Center in a discussion on modernity, religious pluralism, and public orthodoxy.

[3] Gavin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," in *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 223-32.

[4] Mohammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (Islamic Studies Dept., Centre for International and Cultural Studies. London: Al-Hoda, 1999).

[5] Harold J. Berman, *Faith and Order: The Reconciliation of Law and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), ix.

[6] Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).

[7] In *Religions and Political Society: Jürgen Moltmann, Herbert W. Richardson, Johann Baptist Metz, Willi Oelmüller, M. Darrol Bryant* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 101-20.

[8] Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[9] See James Carroll, *Constantine*'s *Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Boston and New York: Houghton Miffin Company, 2001), 165-94.

[10] "The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology," in *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 161-81.

[11] *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 103-226.

J. Denny Weaver. *The Nonviolent Atonement.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

A stubborn and provocative controversialist, J. Denny Weaver has long argued all-but-violently that nonviolence is intregal to the gospel, has insisted that Christian orthodoxies must be judged accordingly rather than serve as the ultimate bar of judgment, and has thus refused to go unnoticed. *The Nonviolent Atonement* represents the maturing of his arguments, and this work is stronger and more convincing for its measured, systematic, and considered tone.

Central to Weaver's project is his advocacy of a "narrative Christus Victor" conception of atonement. Based upon the earliest Christian views of atonement but correcting for flaws in the classic version of Christus Victor, this theology would entirely displace the other two major atonement theories, if Weaver had his way. Anselmian "substitutionary" atonement is his main target, but even Abelardian "moral influence" atonement suffers from the insoluble problem in Anselm's theory: Since God the Father is in some way made the cause of the Son's suffering, violence is portrayed as necessary for salvation. Christian theology and practice thus become more prone to condone violence, not only in war but also against oppressed groups. Meanwhile, the Christian ethic of nonviolence as Jesus taught and embodied it becomes marginal.

Narrative Christus Victor not only avoids the dynamic that feminists have provocatively labeled "divine child abuse" but fulfills the book title's promise to show that God's saving work is nonviolent — and thus that active nonviolent love is the power that truly moves the cosmos. God's sending and Jesus' coming were not an elaborate scheme to produce the innocent death needed for a metaphysical exchange of debt and forgiveness, but were to announce and embody the ultimate victory of God's Reign over the powers of evil in which all humanity is in some way complicit. Because evil and injustice do not readily concede their hold, conflict was inevitable and ultimate confrontation resulting in Jesus' death was predictable, but that does not mean God intended Jesus' death. God's intent was to expose the injustice of the powers and inaugurate God's just and loving alternative, even at the cost of death. The resurrection (which, tellingly, other atonement theories hardly treat or need) was God's vindication of Jesus' nonviolent resistance to and victory over evil, empowering God's people to live already according to God's Reign.

Unlike the other atonement theories, narrative Christus Victor is thus richly biblical. At first, Weaver's heavy reliance on what many consider a marginal text of the canon — the book of Revelation — might seem to complicate that claim. That book demonstrates how the drama of salvation moves on the cosmic-yet-historical stage. Though God makes “war” on the powers that structure our world through injustice, the battle is nonviolent, for the victor worthy to unlock the scrolls of history is the slain and bloodied Lamb. Also commending this motif are its ecclesiological implications, for the martyrs who overcome through their own nonviolent suffering, and indeed the entire faithful Church, are active participants in the cosmic drama of salvation.

Weaver also demonstrates the Christus Victor motif at work in the gospels, Paul, the letter to the Hebrews, and the history of biblical Israel. Weakest, perhaps, is his treatment of Pauline theology. Weaver contends that narrative Christus Victor is present and compatible with Pauline thought, but he overstretches his argument when he implies that Paul’s atonement theology is exclusively Christus Victor. Still, by the end (226), Weaver has reason to conclude that “narrative Christus Victor is much more than an atonement motif.” After all, it “poses a comprehensive way to see God working in the world, and thus suggests a reading of the Bible’s story from beginning to end.”

Weaver’s core advocacy of narrative Christus Victor appears in the first three chapters, along with his more direct engagement with Anselm and his defenders in the final chapter. In between, Weaver includes a chapter each on black, feminist, and womanist theology, in order to marshal support for his critique of mainstream Christian orthodoxy. Anselm’s atonement theory relied on what Weaver considers the abstract Christological formulas of Nicea and Chalcedon. According to the liberationist theologians he surveys, those formulas marginalized the life and ethic of Jesus, and thus allowed slavery, racism, and patriarchal domination of women.

Weaver is surely correct that theologies emerging from particular situations of oppression have no less a right to address all Christians with normative truth claims. The use that white liberals make of them does sometimes seem faddish; Weaver is not so fawning, for his appropriation of these theologies is critical when necessary. It is instructive, however, that he goes into far more detail in surveying black, feminist, and womanist theologies than he needs for his own argument. One wonders whether these contemporary theologies, which at points owe as much to Enlightenment philosophy as to authentic voices of the oppressed, are serving Weaver as a kind of reverse (underside) Christendom — the bar of theological judgment before which he feels he must pass for approval.

If Weaver wants wide acceptance for narrative Christus Victor he might have given at least as exhaustive attention to the ways that Christus Victor establishes the grace and forgiveness of God for the believer, guides Christians through the thorny question of free will versus predestination, holds together the justice and mercy of God, and requires ethically transformed Christian lives while avoiding the trap of works-righteousness. Weaver attends to these topics in part of chapter 3, and again more briefly in chapter 7, but many readers will wish he had said more.

Weaver's secondary objective remains to de-legitimize "theology in general," that theology which claims to be the self-evidently universal starting point for all Christian reflection because it enjoys the mantel of catholic orthodoxy. Here, his success is mixed. One may accept his point that all theologies are particular, even dominant ones, but conclude instead that Christians thus need to seek, sift, and own the widest and most catholic theological wisdom possible, as discovered through many centuries, cultures, and experiences.

Atonement theology itself provides examples. Insofar as Weaver has aimed *The Nonviolent Atonement* toward an ecumenical audience, he has made a successful (and certainly not heterodox) case for narrative Christus Victor. Yet he has probably overplayed his case against the substitutionary and moral influence theories. His stubborn refusal to concede even an inch to them may actually have weakened his case. Surely he must recognize that moral influence dynamics play a role in contemporary nonviolent actions and the power of the cross. But what about substitutionary atonement?

It is sad for the Christian community and unfortunate for Weaver's own project that his animus toward the work of fellow Mennonite theologian Thomas Finger has kept him at such a distance from Finger's chapters on atonement in his Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach. There, Finger argued that Christus Victor provides the best overarching framework for atonement theology, but also accounted for a properly substitutionary dimension within Christus Victor along with a moral influence dynamic. Weaver may well have improved on Finger's case for Christus Victor, and he may be right to reject Anselm's version of substitutionary atonement altogether. Yet he could have scored all of his points against Anselmian doctrine and still recognized the biblical truth that Anselm expressed poorly or dangerously.

This truth is that Jesus Christ does stand in for us, *Deus pro nobis*.

Weaver acknowledges in passing that Jesus' death constituted a vicarious sacrifice "for us" (75-76). He explores "sacrifice" not merely as suffering but as self-offering (59-60), a meaning which Protestant theology has generally obscured though Catholicism has never lost. He mentions the power of stories in which parents and missionaries have willingly died for others (211). If he were not so reticent to employ the word "substitutionary," then, Weaver might have strengthened his case, done a better job of appropriating Pauline theology, and drawn on additional texts such as Isaiah's portrayal of the Suffering Servant — all by naming the ways that the Christus Victor narrative itself moves dramatically forward through the substitutionary faithfulness by which God enters human history to stand in for God's people when they fail to fulfill God's calling.

Weaver will not have the last word on these matters (cf. 228), or on the many additional issues of historiography and philosophy, as well as theology, that his work provokes. First among these, his project could benefit from a debate that clarifies the sense in which God, in every Person of the Trinity, does exercise judgment and vengeance even if nonviolently, through blessings that feel like tortuous "coals of fire" to those who refuse them (Rom. 12:14-21). Again, Weaver's case would be stronger if he would acknowledge the legitimate claims of "classical" Christian theology that God *is* Judge, precisely in order to circumvent violence-justifying appropriations of what is an inextricably biblical motif.

This book, a pleasant surprise and a pleasure to read, is accessible for use in college classes, should be required reading in seminaries, and will profit any adult Christian education class serious about theological literacy. Weaver's interlocutors should use his arguments in *The Nonviolent Atonement* to improve their own, just as he has used their objections to earlier monographs to improve upon his.

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David Lyon. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000.

In *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, David Lyon, professor of sociology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, provides a philosophically informed, theologically intelligent, sociological analysis of our current circumstance. In this volume, Lyon succeeds in showing how different the world has become and what a difference this makes for religious life. The cultural ground of everyday life has shifted — and the results have taken many sociologists by surprise. The surprise is chiefly to be seen in the unanticipated resilience, restructuring, and resurgence of religious life and practice: “Religious life is not shrinking, collapsing, or evaporating, as predicted by modernistic secularization theorists. Rather, in deregulated and post-institutional forms, the religious life draws upon multifarious resources with consequences, for better or worse, that are hard to predict, but that cry out for understanding” (19).

At the same time, religious leaders ought not to underestimate the challenge to religious life and practice internal to the conditions that now characterize our postmodern situation. In particular, Lyon identifies two principal, mutually reinforcing developments that bring to visibility the shift in the social setting of everyday life: one technological and the other economic. According to Lyon, “Above all, the postmodern relates to the development and diffusion of communication and information technology and to the growth of consumerism. These in turn both depend upon and stimulate global flows of communication, cultural codes, wealth and power” (37).

In this culture of conspicuous consumption and promiscuous communication, fundamental dimensions of everyday life are re-configured, namely authority, identity, time, and space. Because these dimensions of existence are central to religious life and practice, it follows that religious life will undergo significant revision. The central thesis of Lyon’s book is that “the postmodern places question marks over older, modern assumptions about authority, and it foregrounds questions of identity. It does so because at a profound social level, time and space, the very matrix of human social life, are undergoing radical restructuring” (11). The book becomes an exploration of these four dimensions of social existence and how they are being fundamentally re-configured by the proliferation of communication and information technologies (CITs) and by the rise of consumerism.

Lyon provides an account of our current circumstance that does not tell us things we already know but lack sufficient research to confirm. Rather, he brings into focus those realities that we are already experiencing but have not been able to name or articulate, let alone interpret. There is no argument that change is occurring. What we lack is an intelligent, interesting, and compelling conversation about how the flow of change is re-ordering our days. For example, connecting the dimensions of time and space with the impact of CITs on everyday life surfaces our failure to comprehend the theological significance of the presence of technology in everyday life.

Lyon's trenchant analysis and critique of the realities of CIT's and consumerism is intended to evoke response, not to foreclose it. He claims that a dynamic internal to Christian engagement with culture gives it the capacity to act on its own terms rather than to run for cover into a fundamentalist enclave or capitulate to a "Disneyfied" culture that "trivializes truth, simplifies suffering, and sucks us into its simulated realities as extras in the spectacle" (148). Lyon helps us see how the break-up of modernity breaks open new arenas for religious life. "[F]ar from foreclosing the possibilities for appropriate Christian living, these conditions actually open the door to new variations, new combinations of authentic and responsible action"(143). Amidst the undeniable cracks appearing in institutional, conventional religious life, there is flowering and flourishing of religious life and practice.

Lyon concludes his account on a note that sounds far more sermonic than sociological: "The old story, after all, recounts how the most significant initiatives are not human ones and that ironic reversals — life out of death, strength in weakness, richness in poverty — are the real stuff of history" (147). Amen and amen.

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John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2001.

Within a platform of dialogue with other Christian theological traditions, this volume celebrates some of the most important characteristics of Anabaptist theological discourse and community. The diversity of the contributors is a clear indication that the Anabaptist tradition is a resourceful conversational partner offering important lessons for other Christian theological contexts. Here one encounters perspectives from Baptist scholars (James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Glen H. Stassen); an Evangelical (Christopher D. Marshall);

United Methodists (Stanley Hauerwas, Richard B. Hays, Michael Cartwright); a member of the Brethren (Nancey Murphy); an Anglican (Christopher Rowland); an Episcopalian (Rodney Clapp); a Cistercian Brother (Eoin de Bhaldraithe); a Peruvian Baptist (Samuel Escobar); a member of the Reformed tradition (Richard J. Mouw); and a Mennonite (Stuart Murray). Together and from their individual faith backgrounds they offer a mosaic of engagements with the theological richness of the radical reformation.

A first lesson is the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist ethical values. Anabaptist theology represents a commitment to integrating all the dimensions of life under an "ethical christocentrism" (Marshall). In fact, it is the ethics of Jesus Christ, as described largely in the Sermon on the Mount, that provide the church with the pattern of proper Christian living. That is, all believers are called to active participation and involvement for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ (Stassen). In this case, living the Christian life enjoys primacy over dogma. Following Christ can only be expressed through concrete service for the poor and disenfranchised, making Christian discipleship a pattern of Christian life (Rowland).

Another notable feature of Anabaptist theology is its strong commitment to the biblical text. Anabaptist reading of the Scripture reveals a sophisticated hermeneutics that goes beyond literalist sentiments and hermeneutic methodologies which fail to take the biblical text seriously. This is a "hermeneutics of the people of God," where members of the community are invited to participate in the interpreting of the text, and access God's biblical message (Cartwright).

Perhaps one of the most commonly known characteristics of Anabaptist communities is their radical posture against violence and war as a legitimate Christian response in the presence of conflict. This commitment to pacifism becomes all the more relevant when one is confronted with the human toll incurred by war and violence (McClendon). One needs to keep in mind that Anabaptists do not conceive this commitment to pacifism as separate from the mission of the church. Pacifism is a concept that grows out of the community's life. Thus, what we see in the Anabaptist pacifist outlook is a sophisticated ecclesiology that derives from its Christology (Hauerwas).

These key characteristics of Anabaptist theology make it a powerful partner in the development of social ethics among Evangelicals in Latin America. They open new horizons for understanding Christian life and mission in this world (Escobar). They show that the Anabaptists represent an opposition to the status quo. This explains why they are identified as embodying a *radical tradition*, so called because it seeks to participate in the formation of a new reality, a new *polis* (Hays). On one hand, this is a healthy antidote to dissatisfying Protestant theological stances concerning war and peace. On the other hand, the emphasis on the communal element of the Christian faith makes it an appealing alternative to the modern individualistic approach (Murphy). The Anabaptists offer useful theological grounds for entering a true dialogue with emerging theological voices in other parts of the world, and with the growing Pentecostal movement (Murray). Therefore, the Anabaptist theological position is not something that can be easily ignored by other traditions. The challenge is to abandon previous attitudes of "Mennophobia" in order to create the groundwork for proper theological dialogue (Mouw).

Moreover, the Anabaptist practice of adult baptism opens the door for entering a fruitful conversation with other perspectives, which would be impossible otherwise. It is only in this way that a true ecumenical attitude will be developed among the various traditions, including the Anabaptist (Bhaldraithe). In sum, the conversations in *Engaging Anabaptism* intend to show the extent to which Anabaptist theology and practices have influenced other Christian traditions. They embody a growing attitude that seeks to create networks of conversation and mutual learning among diverse traditions (Clapp).

Despite the significant contributions of Anabaptist theology, some criticisms are worth noting. Concerning Anabaptist hermeneutics, one important limitation is the extent to which the Old Testament is perceived as fulfilled in — superseded by — the New Testament. According to Hays, this position is problematic for it fails to place the person of Jesus Christ — if one is to understand the work of God appropriately — within the context of God's work in and for the people of Israel. Moreover, Mouw argues that Anabaptist theology conceives the death of Christ separate from its juridical-penal categories and runs the danger of reducing Christ's death, and the attempt to follow him, into a moralizing interpretation of what happened at Calvary. Perhaps one of the most compelling criticisms relates to the Anabaptist pacifist stance: While it is understood as a nonconformist position, it may also result in an attitude of non-commitment to the world, turning pacifism into passivism in the face of injustice (Marshall). Finally, Anabaptist individualistic spirituality prevents the incorporation of a more eucharistic-sacramental celebration of worship within the community, (Clapp, Hauerwas).

This book provides a critical understanding of Anabaptist theology within the context of important concerns for other theological traditions. It demonstrates the profound impact the radical reformation has had since its birth in the sixteenth century.

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