
MUHAMMAD ASAD: BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

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In April 2011 an international symposium was held in Riyadh, under the auspices of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies as well as the Austrian Embassy to Saudi Arabia, on the life and work of my father. The conference as a whole was entitled “Muhammad Asad—A Life for Dialogue,” but I was asked by the organizers to write specifically on “Muhammad Asad, Between Religion and Politics.” Unfortunately I was unable to attend the symposium so I sent in my written contribution to be read out by someone else at the meeting. What follows is a slightly elaborated version of the argument I sent.

Keywords: Muhammad Asad; History of Islamic thought; Islamic politics; Islam and modernism.

I should begin by correcting a view that has become common among people interested in my father’s life and work, that his conversion can be seen as the building of a bridge between Islam and the West. He has even

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been described by some as a European intellectual who came to Islam with the aim of liberalizing it. Nothing could be further from the truth. When he embraced Islam (*aslama*, “submitted,” is the Arabic term) he entered a rich and complex religious tradition that had evolved in diverse ways—mutually compatible as well as in conflict with one another—for over a millennium and a half. Thus in his own life’s work he sought to use the methodology of the medieval Spanish theologian Abū Muḥammad Ibn Hazm, he drew often and copiously on the interpretations of the nineteenth-century Egyptian reformer Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and again, despite strong disagreement on various points of substance with the fourteenth-century Syrian theologian Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, he attempted, like the latter, to integrate reason (*‘aql*), tradition (*naql*), and free-will (*irāda*), to form a coherent and distinctive vision of Islam. His view of Sufism, incidentally, was also influenced by Ibn Taymiyya, for whom it was the excess of Sufis rather than Sufism as such that was the object of reproach. In fact, most of what my father published in the early years of his life (*Islam at the Crossroads*,¹ the translation of *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,² the periodical *Arafāt*,³ etc.) was addressed not to Westerners but to fellow-Muslims. I would say, therefore, that he was concerned less with building bridges and more with immersing himself critically in the tradition of Islam that became *his* tradition, and with encouraging members of *his* community (Muslims) to adopt an approach that he considered to be its essence. His autobiography was the first publication that was addressed to non-Muslims (as well as to Muslims, of course), a work in which he attempted to lay out to a popular audience not only how he became a Muslim but also what he thought was wonderful about Islam. His translation of the Qurʾān into English, completed in the latter part of his life, was not simply a translation: it was a detailed presentation of his final vision of Islam.

My father was not a political but a religious thinker for whom the Qurʾān and Sunna together formed what he called “the most perfect plan for human living.” It was in this connection that he wrote on the idea of an Islamic state, and even prepared suggestions for an Islamic Constitution in Pakistan in the early years of its existence. These suggestions were elaborated in his well-known book, *Principles of State and Government in Islam*.⁴ But his interest in that subject declined in later years when he became preoccupied with his translation of

1. *Islam at the Crossroads* (rev. ed. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982).

2. *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Early Years of Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1981; new ed. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002).

3. *Arafāt: A Monthly Critique of Muslim Thought* (Dalhousie, 1946-1947).

4. *Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961; rev. ed. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

the Qurʾān.⁵ Like most intellectuals who have lived a long life (born in 1900, he died in 1992), his views evolved and developed through reflection and changing circumstances. I am not able to trace this development here, but I will nevertheless try, by thinking about what he said and wrote two decades after his death, to interpret and reconstruct what I believe was his vision of Islam. In doing so I will sometimes disagree with what he wrote and sometimes try to make explicit what I see as valuable but implicit in his views, and elaborate on it.

The first and most important idea in my father's vision has to do with his conviction that access to Islam is based on reason, and that therefore *argument* is necessary to becoming and being a Muslim. When I was a boy he used to tell me that one must try to persuade other Muslims and non-believers not by force but by reason: This is what the Qurʾān means by saying *There is no compulsion in religion (lā ikrāha fid-dīn; Q 2:255)*. In the Qurʾān, he pointed out, God always addresses human beings by appeal to reason. If you read it carefully, you will realize that the Qurʾān is *continually engaged in argument* by means of provocative questions because argument is what it expects its listeners to understand. So when the Islamic message fails to persuade by reason, he insisted that Muslims must live in mutual acceptance with the followers of all religions, hence another Qurʾānic saying: *To you, your religion; to me, mine (lakum dīnukum wa liy ad-dīn; Q 109:6)*. God reveals his message at a particular moment in history through Muḥammad, “the last of the Prophets,” but he doesn't control everything in the world. Humans are free to choose what to believe and how to act: *Truly, We offered the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up—for, truly, he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish (innā ʿaraḍnā l-amāna ʿala s-samāwāti wal-ard wal-jibālī fa-abayna an yahmilnahā wa ashfaḡna minhā wa hamalahā insānu innahu kāna zalūman jahūlan; Q 33:72)*. Divine intervention, my father claimed, is not essentially an Islamic idea; the only miracle in Islam is the Qurʾān itself. Hence another of his favorite Qurʾānic citations: *Truly, God does not change a people's condition unless they change their inner selves (inna Llāha lā yughayyiru mā bi-qawmin hattā yughayyirū ma bi-anfusihim; Q 13:11)*.

I recall my father often reciting the following verses: *Truly, those who have come to believe, and those who belong to the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabeians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do what is right—shall have their reward with their God, and they need not fear and they will not grieve (inn alladhīna āmanu walladhīna hādu wan-nasāra was-sābiʿīna man āmana billāhi wal-yawmī l-ākhirī wa ʿamila ṣālihan falahum ajruhum ʿinda rabbihim wa lā khawfun ʿalayhim wa lā hum yahzanūn; Q 2:62)*. There was nothing, he would say, quite

5. *The Message of the Qurʾān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; new ed. United Kingdom: The Book Foundation, 2003).

like these verses either in the Hebrew Bible or in the Gospels. And the verses expressed the Islamic teaching that followers of Judaism and Christianity, “the people of the book” (*ahl al-kitāb*), belong to the very tradition that culminates in Islam: They were earlier revelations that had become distorted over time but were nevertheless to be recognized as having truth in them. They might be doctrinally mistaken but it followed from the fact of a common tradition that they were to be respected. Unlike the historic Christian view, the continued presence of believers in an earlier religion in the same tradition (i.e., Judaism) is not regarded as a scandal in Islam. It is seen as an indication of how easy it is to remain stubbornly attached to a mistaken point of view. In the “real Islamic tradition,” he would say, there is no simple distinction between friend and enemy, no single divide that categorizes whole peoples of the world into good and evil. To my father this meant therefore that the tradition of Islam not only urged Muslims to tolerate the followers of all other religions, it encouraged them to consider all as deserving of equal respect. And respect meant being able to *listen* sympathetically to what they had to say about their deepest hopes and commitments. In that sense respecting someone was a way of *including* him/her within one’s circle of friends. Although in Islamic history respect was generally accorded to what we now call monotheistic (or “Abrahamic”) religions, my father insisted that the beliefs and rituals of *all* religions should be respected. He acknowledged that there were other verses in the Qurʾān that mentioned Jews or Christians critically, but he held that these were responses to specific historical circumstances in the Prophet’s life and they referred to particular groups whose attitude in particular situations indicated the difficulties of an alliance between them and the nascent Muslim community. Some Muslims in our day might invoke these verses but they were not, he insisted, *doctrinal* statements about Judaism or Christianity within the Islamic scheme of things. In any case, divine truth belonged to the larger tradition within which these religions emerged and not to the actual practice of Muslims, because distortion and misunderstanding of the divine message was found not only among Jews and Christians but among Muslims too.

For my father, however, reason was important not only for encouraging Muslims to address non-Muslims respectfully and for thinking about their own religion. He believed that reasoned discourse was central to the way Muslims should treat disagreements among themselves—whether in public matters or in private life. In his view, deep disagreements should never lead to the denunciation of other Muslims as unbelievers (*takfīr*), they should produce attempts at persuasion in which each side respects the other even when agreement cannot be reached. Hence he quoted the Prophet’s saying: “Disagreement among the men of learning of my community is a blessing” (*ikhtilāf ʿulamā ummati rahma*). He himself disagreed strongly with many other Muslims about the correct interpretation of Islamic doctrine and

practice. But he despised religious bigotry (*ta'assub*, *tashaddud*) and religious excess (*ghulūww*), and he hated cruelty perpetrated in the name of religious conviction—whether by mobs, or by individuals, or by the state. One was a Muslim if one declared oneself a Muslim; the sincerity of that declaration was a matter between him or her and God.

My father considered religion in general (and as a Muslim, the religion of Islam in particular) to be essential for distinguishing between moral right and wrong, and it was in this that he sought the justification for an Islamic state. He once summed this up in writing as follows: “No nation or community can know happiness unless and until it is truly united from within; and no nation or community can be truly united from within unless it achieves a large degree of unanimity as to what is right and what is wrong in the affairs of men; and no such unanimity is possible unless the nation or community agrees on a moral obligation arising from a permanent, absolute moral law. Obviously, it is *religion* alone that can provide such a law and, with it, the basis for an agreement, within any one group, on a moral obligation binding on all members of that group.”⁶ It is interesting that this argument for the necessity of an Islamic state rests not on what he often called “blind obedience to the past,” but on “reason.”

For my father ethics and law were inseparable—especially for Muslims who are required to be obedient to the will of God. He recognized, of course, that not every unethical act was justiciable, but believed that a state had to be built on religious foundations because only a state could give “divine law” the force it needed to be *law*—and God’s law (God’s will), was the source of all true morality and happiness. But here is my worrying question: If the state is essential for the morality of a community, is it possible for non-Muslims to live ethically within an Islamic state?

Like many advocates of an Islamic state, my father maintained that although non-Muslims were entitled to complete protection as citizens they could not occupy the highest positions in an Islamic state. He thought that this was not a case of unfair treatment but, on the contrary, a recognition of the fact that non-Muslims should not be required to be “totally loyal” (as he put it) to the state that embodied an ideology quite different from their own. The state, in other words, was entitled to demand total loyalty from those able to obey and secure obedience from others on normative grounds. Since non-Muslims were unable to fulfill this double function in an Islamic state, there had to be some formal recognition of this fact.

I want to begin my response by stressing that the state’s demand for absolute loyalty and unity from its subjects is entirely modern. The political unity of all citizens and their unconditional loyalty to the state are principles

6. *Principles of State and Government*, 6; emphasis in original.

of the nation state invoked especially in response to national crises (war, economic disaster, etc.), but pre-modern states could not demand them and did not need them. For pre-modern princes it was the loyalty of nobles, generals, and governors that mattered, not that of ordinary subjects. In fact, the prince had far less effective power over his subjects than the government of a modern state has—partly because of the greater bureaucratic, informational, and technological means at the latter’s disposal and the greater social and geographical impediments facing the former; but also on constitutional grounds. The modern state is a structure distinct from rulers and ruled, and its primary constitutional duty is to maintain itself as a state *by any means necessary*; its fundamental principles are pragmatic and prudential not ethical. That is why the modern state (whether secular or Islamic) can not allow any space within its territory that is independent of its absolute authority. If it is subject to the requirements of international law it is only because and to the extent that it has consented to limit its own sovereignty in specified ways. Debate in the public sphere may crucially influence the formation of authoritative norms, but it is the state itself (not the ruler but the state) that authorizes them. For this reason alone nothing in the past (including the Islamic past) corresponds to it.

Precisely because the modern state’s fundamental rationale is fear of external and internal enemies, it uses its power to demand obedience. In the liberal state certain exceptions to this general compulsion can take the form of “conscientious objection”—so that a citizen whose deep personal conviction prevents him from serving in the military, for example, can legally withdraw from that obligation. The liberal state does not see this as disobedience but as the exercise of a subjective right. However, it makes a sharp separation between “conscientious objection” and “civil disobedience,” where only the latter constitutes an offense against public order.

Given this feature of the modern state, it is not surprising that some Muslims consider that total loyalty to the state contradicts the absolute loyalty they are expected to give to the one and only God, and that they refer to it as “the real idol of society” (*al-ma’būd al-haqīqi lil-mujtama’*). (This attitude to the state follows, incidentally, only from strict monotheism, and reflects what might be called “negative political theology.”) Even the declaration of faith (*shahāda*) itself specifies absolute loyalty only to God and his Prophet and makes no mention of obedience to earthly rulers or to an earthly organization. Islamic states are, of course, concerned with moral political norms. However, whatever one may think of it, strictly speaking the Qur’ānic doctrine of “Commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (*amr bil-ma’rūf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar*) does not logically presuppose a state authority. It does not, in other words, presuppose that only an organ of the state can put that doctrine into practice, although it does preclude the logic of a totally individualistic morality. It is true, of course, that in Muslim history rulers have taken on themselves the

duty of regulating religious and moral behavior (sometimes more rigorously than at other times), despite the principle of “There is no compulsion in religion” (*lā ikrāha fid-dīn*). But the authoritative *norms* for public behavior were not determined by the historical Muslim state as they now are by modern state law; communities of jurists, who were independent (professionally and financially) of the government, determined them.

Like most Muslims, my father considered the identification of God with his creation to be heretical. And since the modern state is a creation of his creatures, it seems to me to follow that it cannot be given absolute loyalty. Of course, those who support the project of an Islamic state also argue that an Islamic ruler should only be obeyed if he himself obeys Islamic norms and applies them properly to his subjects—they invoke the position of medieval theologians such as Ibn Taymiyya who insisted that far from assuming the Muslim subject’s duty of obedience to the Muslim ruler, it was incumbent on the former to combat the latter if he did not follow Islamic norms. That, obviously, opens up questions about the “proper application” of the norms and who is to determine these in a modern state; the brief answer to that is: the modern state itself, either directly through its legislature, administration, and judiciary, or indirectly by bodies that have been duly recognized and licensed by it. The modern state is absolute in a sense that pre-modern states never were. It is therefore not entirely clear to me why my father should have assumed the right of the Islamic state—as a *modern state*—to claim absolute loyalty, and use that as a basis for distinguishing between its Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.

In opposition to what I have just said, advocates assert that absolute loyalty derives from the fact that in an Islamic state “sovereignty” belongs not to humans but to God. But since Qur’anic doctrine insists that *everything* in the universe is subject to God’s authority, it is not clear to me how the state, a human construction, gets its special right to demand absolute loyalty from subjects. Surely, it is precisely because God’s authority cannot be delegated that no human ruler of an Islamic state can speak in his name. The state may be necessary in our contemporary world for carrying out a number of desired functions that only it can perform, and in that context it may claim “sovereignty” by which is meant a set of exclusive rights and powers in relation to other political entities over its own territory and citizens. However, the state cannot acquire a theological title to sovereignty in Islam.

Advocates have suggested that non-Muslims cannot provide absolute loyalty to the Islamic state in which they happen to live, and I have argued not that they *can* but that the very idea of such loyalty derives from the fact that it is *modern* and not from its civil or legal ideology.

But what else can non-Muslims not do in an Islamic state? My father insisted that all citizens of an Islamic state, including non-Muslims, have the

right to public dissent, the right to criticize the government publicly. But to what extent can non-Muslim citizens in an Islamic state criticize a government that is strictly speaking not *their* government? I do not have in mind simply a minority's fear of provoking a majority but also, and more importantly, to the right to be fully involved in the state to be criticized. Because the force of legitimate political dissent depends on the complete involvement of the dissenter in the political life of the state in which he/she lives. More important is the question I raised earlier: If the moral authority of the state is truly essential for individual morality, non-Muslims cannot be regarded as living ethically in a state that is not theirs—and one might argue, therefore, that the modern Islamic state prevents them from doing so.

The Islamic state may have an obligation to protect non-Muslims and allow them total freedom in matters of speech and belief, as well as a considerable degree of autonomy. But the state's obligation to protect all non-Muslims does not entail any right on the part of the latter; they have no *right* to participate fully in the life of the state. A consequence of that obvious fact is the political institutionalization of the distinction between the Muslim majority and the non-Muslim minority with the state seen as belonging by aspiration and identity to the former. My simple point is that if the state is not fully "theirs," non-Muslim citizens cannot really be represented by the modern Islamic state in which they live—just as the non-Jewish citizens of Israel (whether Muslim or Christian) are excluded by the *Jewish* state—and therefore cannot enter critically into its life.

Nevertheless, the question of how ethics and religion can be brought *explicitly* into public life was central to my father's concerns. His preoccupation with ethics is at the bottom of his thinking about the Islamic state. But I think on this matter he moved in the wrong direction. In my view what he omitted to address was the difference between the medieval ruler and the modern state, as well as between politics and the state. Had he done so he might have been less committed to promoting the idea of an Islamic state—and therefore less disappointed in the adventure of the one so-called Islamic state with which he was personally involved (Pakistan). He would have seen that the modern state (whether secular or Islamic) is essentially a power state; it may be necessary for the many benefits citizens obtain today but it is also the source of enormous cruelty, oppression, and destruction.

It therefore seems to me that for Muslims the possibilities of "political Islam" may lie not in the aspiration to acquire state power and to apply divinely authorized law through it but in the practice of public argument, and in a struggle guided by deep religious commitments that are both narrower and wider than the nation state. Politics in this sense is not *party* politics, it is not a duel between pre-established *partial* interests within the over-arching modern state: it is about values in the process of being discovered (or rediscovered)

and formed (or reformed) within complex traditions. It presupposes openness and readiness to take risks in confronting the modern state that the state (and party politics) cannot tolerate. This politics may confront the liberal state by opposing particular policies through civil disobedience, or even by rising up against an entire political order.

I end with a substantive point about my father's moral vision and its connections to state and politics that seems to me especially important.

More than once he recited *Surat al-takāthur* to me with great feeling: *You are consumed with unending desire for more even until you die (alhākumu t-takāthur hattā zurtum al-maqābir; Q 102:1-2)*. These verses, he would say, condemn the unending consumerism and greed in which humans, especially in our time, are entrapped: The verses that refer to *the knowledge of certainty* (*‘ilm al-yaqīn; Q 102:5*) and that seek to persuade the listener/reader that *Indeed you would see hell (latarawunna al-jahīm Q 102:6)*, that hell was actually the way he or she lived in this world, not merely the punishment in the life to come. My father read these verses as arguing that if we could see this truth with clarity we would realize the hellish aspect of our collective life, the damage we do to ourselves and to others. This was a central moral concern for him, but it also points to where the concept of an Islamic *politics* might begin. Muslims are expected to believe that greed as a *collective* way of life (the insatiable desire for more) and exhibitionism as an individual style (in which theatrical presentations of the self and consumer choices are confused with moral autonomy) have together seduced people away from an awareness of the objective consequences of the way we live: militarization of societies, growing disparity between rich and poor, continuous destruction of the natural environment, accumulating climatic and nuclear disasters.

Yet what is not always appreciated is that the way we live now is dependent on a particular kind of state, not only one demanding absolute loyalty, but also regulating and protecting an economy through the values of consumerism and individualism. The secular liberal state encourages a paradoxical value according to which individual “freedom” (especially the right to expression, assembly, and privacy) is affirmed, and collective “freedom” is to be protected through increasingly intrusive “security” measures. Yet neither individual “freedom” nor collective security is immune to the forces of global capitalism that undermine the “sovereignty” of modern states, whether Islamic or secular. To the extent that the state serves a neo-liberal economy (the commoditization of everything in an increasingly unstable world) an “Islamic politics” might try to find spaces outside it—even against it—rather than aiming to replace a “secular” state ideology by a “religious” one. This would require a politics that seeks moral alliances with non-Islamic movements and traditions, among the state's population and beyond, having similar ethical concerns. This is

not politics in the Schmittian sense of a confrontation between “friend” and “enemy,” but in the sense of trying to *force* unregarded questions into the public domain as defined by the liberal state.

The struggle for encouraging public virtue and resisting oppression is opposed to an overriding interest in material accumulation, in securing what one enjoys as an individual against others who might covet what one owns. Fear is the dark side of greed, but greed isn't simply “inordinate desire,” it indicates the disease of a world in process of dissolution. Opposed to it is *political struggle* in a cause that transcends the fear of death and loss. This kind of politics does not accept the liberal state's claim to secular neutrality. Politics in this sense arises out of a desire to extend and defend a *democratic ethos* (that seeks to connect through relations between living things) rather than the *liberal democratic state* (that seeks to homogenize all that is subject to it). It is only struggle as a moral/religious effort (*jihād*), a struggle without fear of death but not a struggle *for* death, that can sustain a concern for the enhancement of common life for Muslims and non-Muslims, animals and humans, and that can confront contemporary global disasters generated by the lust for material gain and military power.

One might suggest that an Islamic politics has two aspects: First, inviting interlocutors (trying to *win them over*) to alter their individual and collective ways of life in a different direction, whether this is done in public or in private. In either case persuasion presupposes particular sensibilities in listeners and it appeals to the manifest character of the person who seeks to persuade, as well as the substance of what is actually said, done, and demonstrated. The sensibilities and qualities of character are together what an Islamic politics *might* aim to cultivate in its own distinctive way. Beginning with individual faith (*imān*)—with the recognition that differences among people is an invitation to mutuality—it moves to building civil relationships and friendships with non-Muslims as well as Muslims in spaces within and beyond what is recognized as “national territory”: the heterogeneity of peoples and ways of life is seen by the Qur'an as an essential and permanent condition of the world, as my father often insisted: *Truly, we have created you from male and female and fashioned you into peoples and tribes so that you can come to know one another (inna khalaqnākum dhakar wa untha wa ja'alnākum shu'ūban wa qabā'il lita'arafu; Q 49:13)*. This does not apply simply to nation states (in fact there is no reference to states in the Qur'an) but to every kind of human difference.

But there is also another aspect of this politics: it is not *competitive* (parties seeking electoral victory) but *confrontational* (challenging the massive power of the state). This politics is “political” not in the sense of a struggle for power, nor in the sense of an attempt to represent the self-understanding of the community's unity in a social movement. It is not “political” as defined by class struggle (*a la* Marx), or as an extension of war by other means into

civil society (to invert Clausewitz). It is “political” because ordinary subjects demand collectively to be heeded. Hence open disobedience to the state’s law is practiced in response to the state’s exclusive, even if legal, policies, and in which absolute loyalty to it is repudiated as *shirk* (the major sin of giving partners to God). This politics might be seen as a collective performance of *amr bil-ma’rūf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar*, but without invoking the powers of the state and without presupposing “national unity.” The purpose of such politics is not to improve the world but to rectify one small part of it in one small time. Given global capitalism, and the ambitions of Imperial Powers, it is not only the “sovereign” state that is confronted but also the international bodies that work through it to dominate a common world. “National unity” is by definition exclusive, and yet in political economic terms it is the illusion that enables the state to demand sacrifice; it can be confronted with the awareness of greater dangers and the promise of wider friendships. Of course non-Muslims too (including religious and non-religious individuals of all kinds) engage in “civil disobedience.” But for most secularists that practice is typically rooted in “a moral conscience”—something they regard as an *individual* ethical choice in a particular situation.

For Islamic confrontational politics, it seems to me, the motive force need not be a sovereign individual “conscience” (subject to continual redefinitions through history) but an embodied disposition that (a) is cultivated over time, (b) draws its authority from a “religious” tradition, and (c) engages in a continuous struggle through “civil disobedience” *against* the commoditization of the environment, the economy, and human relations, arising from the notion of “thanking the benefactor” (*shukr al-mun‘im*)—that is, of thanking the divine giver for his bounty to humankind which the Qur’ān repeatedly speaks of as his wondrous signs (*āyāt*). One may detect an invitation to enchantment in this idea, although the word *sihr*, which is the usual rendering of “enchantment,” is never used by Muslims in this context. I refer to it here partly to problematize its use in post-Weberian accounts by suggesting that it relates to something rarely noted by social theorists: an encounter with wondrous things and events in the world, a world that, for the Muslim believer, has been made by the Creator. Regarded in this way, “enchantment” is not simply an obstacle to reason, something that has to be shed when modernity is achieved. It becomes the ground for engaging with the world in a particular way. Enchantment “charms” one out of a habitual state of indifference into a state of wonder made possible by alerted senses. Of course, enchantment may deceive (the sources of deception are many), but the loss of enchantment is more than simply the removal of a source of delusion. It constitutes a particular loss.

It seems to me evident that this notion of an Islamic politics draws one away from the modern project of an Islamic state that cannot be different in essence from any modern state. I believe that this is also the view implicit

in my father's life and writing, and therefore the most important part of his legacy. And I want to stress, finally, that he was not a lone figure who belonged essentially to Europe as some have alleged; he belonged to a rich historical tradition of thought and practice within Islam, a tradition (like others) that offers a variety of interpretive possibilities. Like all other practicing Muslims, he does not stand outside Islamic tradition but within it, and like them, his life and thought show the different positions that can be taken up within it. Those many people in the West today who decry the singular intolerance of Islam are mistaken not because Islam is really "tolerant" (whatever that might mean), but because it makes no sense to talk about the "essence of Islam"—or of any other "religion" for that matter—if one is not already in some sense committed to it. Talk about the *essence* of a religious or non-religious tradition is part of a political discourse of persuasion or dissuasion; it is not a neutral exercise of Reason.

I would suggest that seeing my father's life in this way is more important than the idea of "a dialogue between Islam and the West" that has now become fashionable. The so-called "dialogue of civilizations" seems to be based on a double premise: (a) that Muslims should try to reassure Europeans and North Americans that Islam is not a source of violence, and at the same time, (b) that Westerners should help to reform Islam. This is a very condescending notion. Could it be that the recent call for "dialogue" is motivated not by a simple desire to reach out to others but by a fear of "invading" immigrants? At any rate, one cannot object to Muslims opening their minds to other societies and traditions, and so learning from them critically—just as one hopes non-Muslim Westerners will want to learn from Islamic thought and experience in a similar spirit. I do think, however, that such mutual learning is made more difficult for reasons of global power rather than religious ideologies. As for reform, it should be borne in mind that Islam's history of reform is virtually as old as the religion itself. Of course Islamic reform today will need to be based on fresh thinking, but its effectiveness is partly dependent on simultaneous reform in the West itself, if that is possible. We do, after all, live in a single interconnected world.