

EVOLUTION, CAUSALITY, AND TRANSCENDENTAL TRUTHS

Wolfgang Smith in conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal

In this wide-ranging conversation, Wolfgang Smith, one of the leading philosopher and scientist and Muzaffar Iqbal discuss various aspects of evolution in the light of ancient wisdom and transcendental truths. The free-flowing exchange includes discussion on the emergence of new Muslim evolutionists, reflections on Einstein's theory of relativity, Heisenberg's insights on the impact of technology on non-Western cultures, Teilhard de Chardin and his views, the difference between vertical and horizontal causality, transcendental truths, Martin Lings' insights into the nature of our times, Frithjof Schuon and his views on the transcendent unity of religions, Smith's comparative work on Christianity and the Vedic traditions, al-Ghazālī's arguments from the design of the beehives, and the need and limits of inter-religious discourse.

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MI: First of all, I would like to once again thank you for this conversation in which we hope to discuss various aspects of Evolution, specifically from your perspective in which I see several connections with what Islamic tradition says on vertical causality—and you have written a whole book on that subject—so just to map our conversation today: I hope we can discuss various aspects of the Evolutionary narrative, from the time of its emergence in the nineteenth century onward, including certain aspects of its reception in the Christian tradition. I also hope we can discuss, in some detail, Theistic Evolution, which Richard Dawkins very cleverly likened to smuggling God into Evolution from the back door. This is important because some of these newer versions of evolution have now infiltrated almost the entire globe, including the Muslim world, where certain loud voices are calling for the acceptance of an Islamic version of what was, and is, Christian Theistic Evolution.

WS: I am very sorry to hear that, Dr Iqbal, because my impression, based upon things that I have read many years ago, was that the Muslim world has managed to avoid these heresies, which have really been devastating in the Christian sphere. And now, if I understand you correctly, there's a trend in the Muslim world itself to move in the same direction.

MI: That's right. It's very sad, but this is the reality we are facing. Of course, Muslim world is a wide spectrum, but over the last twenty years, this trend has become very strong in every part of the Muslim world and I am rather dismayed by the current scenario, because some thirty years ago, when certain fundamental shifts were happening in the educational system at the school level, we were shocked with the emergence of the Western-style schools all over the Muslim world, but now this has reached the University level, especially in the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries, where campuses of American universities have become widespread. This means a whole new generation of young Muslims has been raised on a totally un-Islamic and un-Qur'ānic Weltanschauung, and these reformed Muslims have no problem with Evolution. This generation does not even know that it does know, and this compound ignorance, *jahl murakkab*—as they say in Arabic—also has aggression in it; meaning these advocates of Evolution are not only ignorant about the perspective of the Qur'ān and the Islamic tradition, they are utterly convinced that it has no contradictions with the Qur'ānic teachings and they are aggressively promoting it. In a way, they are fulfilling the prophecy of the Prophet, upon him blessing and peace, who foretold this when he said, “You will follow the ways of those who were before you, hand span by hand span and cubit by cubit so much so that even if they entered a lizard's hole, you would follow them.” And when his Companions asked him, “Do you mean [by those who were before you], the Jews and the Christians?” He said, “Who else?”¹

So, it would be good to discuss how you see the impact of the wide-spread acceptance of the Evolution narrative in the Christian tradition.

WS: Yes, it has a very powerful influence on the average man, because Evolutionary narrative is linked to science, which for an average person is actually all these technologies, for example, our conversation is happening through these technologies, over the internet, and an average person perceives this as miraculous, or at the very least, power of science, and when the same science is supposedly endorsing Evolution, then this becomes a persuasive argument that the scientist, who knows

1. Bukhārī, *al-I'tiṣām bi-l-kitāb wa-l-Sunnah* (3456); Muslim, *K. al-'Ilm, Itibā' sunan al-yahūd wa-l-naṣāra* (2669).

almost everything, the all-knowing scientist is saying all of this happened through evolution.

MI: That is very true. I recall my mother-in-law, who died in 2015 at the ripe age of 93, used to say that about the telephonic conversations when we lived in Pakistan, that it was a miracle that she can connect with us over such long distances through this simple device; I wonder what would she say now! Of course, that is not what she really meant, she knew this is not a miracle, yet, that is the common perception.

WS: Absolutely. I think there's no quick and easy way to change these things; it is not something we'll do instantaneously. For one thing, of course, I think it is essential, in order to break this stronghold, to keep the religious life on a sufficiently high level. In other words, we need the help of God. And we need to make use of whatever religious foundation exists in order to use its help in destroying these illusions. And then the next thing is we need appropriate literature. And I have been involved in this project for a long time, and have written many books—and in a sense each of these books deals with some aspect of this problem—so I think books of that kind are necessary, and it is necessary also to have an outreach on the secondary level. You might say that books, the kind of books I am referring to, are for intellectuals, and that it is necessary to set the intellectuals straight, because in our age, the intellectuals worldwide are serving the reverse purpose of what they are meant to do. God meant them to enlighten people, and they are confusing people and causing people to look in the wrong direction.

So we need food for the intellectuals, and that is relatively simple. The books exist. It is just necessary to disseminate them, to see to it that considerable segments of the intellectual class have the right ideas. That's comparatively easy, because actually, from a theoretical point of view, evolution is absolutely impossible. This is almost a mathematical theorem. As a matter of fact, Dr Iqbal, it is a mathematical theorem. No doubt you are acquainted with the work of an American mathematician, William Dembski.

MI: Of course, we have been in contact since the early 2000s, and, in fact, we had a conversation on this topic two weeks ago in the same format as our conversation today.

WS: Really?

MI: His work is outstanding.

WS: In 1998, he proved the theorem—which is very basic in my language—he proved that horizontal causation cannot produce what he calls complex

specified information. This is a rigorous mathematical proof that since even the simplest living organism contains an immense amount of complex specified information, which horizontal causation cannot produce, therefore random organic evolution is impossible.

But as you know, Dr Iqbal, there has been tremendous pushback on this. Practically all the universities have opposed it savagely. And it is a Satanic phenomenon. Yes, Satan is very much involved in this, because this is total warfare. And incidentally, I would like to point out something which is not well known, but should be well known, namely in the Christian sphere and therefore indirectly worldwide, the main driving force of this teaching evolution was, of course, the Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and when I was writing my book about him, I read everything possible connected with him and I came across a very early paper that he wrote in his 20s, an incident of his early life, that he relates in that paper. He says that one day he was walking in a remote part of the French countryside when, and I quote, “the thing swooped upon me.” And so, he records that he asked the “thing”, ‘who are you?’ And here’s the answer that he got. The “thing” said, quote, “I am the quintessence of all good and all evil and I am now settled upon you in life and in death.”

MI: Really?

WS: These are the words. And I am no exorcist, but I think this is clearly an indication that this man was possessed. I had a good friend, Father Malachi Martin, who was one of the great exorcists, and I am sorry I neglected to ask him, but I have no doubt he would say yes. So, this is also the explanation why Teilhard de Chardin had such power. Because actually, from a normal rational point of view, what he was writing is nonsense. I mean, for example, he spoke of the universe converging to point Omega. The fact is that according to modern physics, the very opposite is true. Everything is flying apart at a speed of about 300,000 km/second. Teilhard de Chardin talks about conversions to Omega. Just a fantasy, which makes no sense either from the standpoint of physics, much less from the standpoint of theology. So, it’s really a phenomenon of Satanic possession. And I think this also explains why the impact upon the Catholic religion was disastrous. There came the Second Vatican Council and the younger representatives, they were all Teilhardians without a single exception, and they completely ran over the old guard and established what could be called a new religion, an encounter religion.

Incidentally, Dr. Iqbal, while we are exchanging ideas, let me just mention that in one of my latest books I have a chapter connecting the

ideas of Teilhard de Chardin with what used to be called Gnosticism, as you know—I don't know if there's any Gnosticism in the Islamic world—but in the Christian world, Gnosticism was always the counter religion to Christianity. And one of the central dogmas, if you will, of the Gnostic gurus was the idea of a higher world that you could somehow fly into. And in this chapter, that I am referring to, I point out that with the introduction of the modern world, there is no more any higher world to fly into, so what did the Gnostics do? They replaced the idea of going into a higher world with the idea of a future world and this is where Teilhard de Chardin and his modernism comes in, because that's exactly what stands at issue here. So the bottom line is that Teilhard de Chardin was not only possessed, but he was the prophet of neo-Nazism, and the central idea of neo-Nazism is Evolution, that is, you replace God with Evolution. So, instead of God being the creator, the universe creates itself and we create ourselves. And according to Teilhard de Chardin, we eventually become God through evolution, so this is the neo-Nazism form of a satanic counter-religion, and that is why it is so strong, because Teilhard de Chardin is not just an individual, he is the mouthpiece of the quintessential evil force in the universe. So, it is no wonder that this movement has been incredibly powerful. It has taken over almost all of our higher education, and now it is going into even the lower grades in schools and children are being taught things which are purely satanic.

MI: Exactly.

WS: So the situation is very grave.

MI: Indeed, very grave. And the tragedy is, as the proverb tells us, everybody's foot is in the foot of the elephant, and what happens here in North America happens everywhere, so the elephant is going around and the whole world is going with that elephant. The modern Western civilization is the elephant that has tied every other civilization to itself. And this is what I find extremely painful about the rise of new Muslim evolutionists, because, our religion is anchored in a Book, that is, as you know, the actual Speech of God and every Muslim believes that and therefore a dichotomy has arisen: We have a Book, a fully protected Book, that has not changed over the last fourteen centuries and that is never going to change, and in it are clear verses telling us how God created us, the whole cosmos and everything in it, and yet, here are some Muslims proclaiming this new religion to be true, while simultaneously believing in the Qur'ān, the very first verse of which proclaims: He is the *Rabb of the 'ālamīn*, that is He is the Sustainer and Lord of the *'ālamīn*, which is everything other than Him: the cosmos and all it contains.

The Book tells us that everything is perishing, will perish, except His Face, that He created everything for a purpose and for a finite time, and yet, they are saying, everything just emerged from these tiny cells and that is how God willed it!

But, as we talked at the beginning of this conversation, the problem we face is this over-reach of the Evolutionary narrative, it has gone everywhere, like a virus, and there seems to be no way of stopping it now, for no civilization has remained immune to it. And we are all weak human beings, we cannot change the direction of the entire world, we understand that, but, at the rational level, you said religion is our starting point, but when it comes to the so-called scientific understanding of the cosmos, of life, of everything around us, we cannot be using the religious language, because they would just say: Oh, wait a minute, that is not science; we need scientific answers.

WS: I think it is impossible to convey these higher truths based on religion to people who are indoctrinated in the modern ideology and believe in it. It is impossible to explain these higher truths to these people, but, I think, the starting point must be to prove to them the absolute nonsense of what they believe, and I think that is possible. At least to some degree, to a small extent, I have done that in my writings. I have argued here and there that the modern *Weltanschauung* is (a) not based upon any scientific principles, and (b) it is really nonsense. And so, I think, this approach should be picked up by as many qualified people as possible, it is a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*.

MI: That reminds me of Ibn Sīnā, who said that retortion may be the only way to deal with the obdurate, *mu'ānid*, who not only rejects the First Principles, but also flips on his own positions over and over, and hence his obstinacy can only be cured if one can show him the invalidity of his own position.

WS: That is interesting. I have used this technique in one of my recent writings, wherein I have pointed out and explained that, in fact, there is really no such thing as a scientific *Weltanschauung*, because if these mathematical physicists were right in what they say, the cosmos would be such that it cannot be looked upon at all. So as soon as you express a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview, you are in a sense denying what science has to say because nobody has seen quantum particles much less their aggregate. So, there is a way of rationally disproving the contemporary outlook. In fact, the more one looks into this, the more amazed one is how really incongruous it is. It reminds me of that famous saying the emperor has no clothes, because if you look upon the modern scientific

Weltanschauung, it really is nonsense and it doesn't take a PhD in anything to recognize that.

MI: I am really fascinated by that, especially the chapter called “The War on Design” in your *Physics & Vertical Causation*,² where you discuss Einstein's insistence on horizontal causality and show how his Principle of Relativity is actually based on an *a priori* rejection of what you have called the Principle of Immobility. This War on Design started way back in the seventeenth century in the Western Civilization, it led to the emergence of a “clockwork universe”, wherein Nature is perceived, on scientific authority, as constituting what Whitehead called “a dull affair—the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.”

WS: I am glad, Dr. Iqbal, that you touched upon the Einstein phenomenon because it is really a very fascinating subject. First of all, let me say that if you take the trouble to look into the predictions of Einsteinian physics and the actual empirical findings, you realize that except for one, there is nothing in Einsteinian predictions that really squares with experimental data, the one exception being the famous “E equals MC squared”, that, of course, is true and immensely powerful. The point is, however, that this formula has nothing to do with Einstein and relativity. And I think even few physicists know that. The reason I can say that is because the formula was known in the 19th century.

MI: Really?

WS: And it occurs in the journal literature before Einstein, somewhere I said before Einstein was born, but that's probably an exaggeration, but certainly before he published his first paper on Relativity in 1905.

So the only point on which Einstein was right has nothing to do with relativity. Everything else was really false. And what saved Einstein, so to speak, is that his predictions differed from classical physics by square root of one minus v squared over c squared, where v is the velocity that we are dealing with, and c is the speed of light. If one remembers how enormous the speed of light is, what this means is that it is almost impossible to find an empirical situation where Einsteinian physics differs measurably from the classical. In this connection I found that there is one such area nowadays, namely the GPS—the Global Positioning System—which involves dimensions where Einsteinian effects become measurable. They're very small, but definitely measurable. And I was very amazed when pursuing this matter, I found out that GPS people don't use relativity because planes would crash, but the political situation is such that they don't admit that, in other words, to the outside world,

2. Angelico Press, 2019.

they use terminology which makes you believe that they use relativistic formula, when in fact they don't. So it's very interesting; if I were young, I would want to study the Einstein phenomenon to see what's behind it.

MI: Yes, I used to be fascinated by the year 1905, when this 25-year-old man published his four *Annus Mirabilis* papers, one after another, which, in retrospect, we say demolished the classical physics and started a new chapter in our understanding of the cosmos, the relativity of time and space, the mass–energy equivalence, $E = mc^2$, and the rest of it. But what you are saying is all new and it is fascinating.

Can you also say something about how Einstein became almost like a symbol of the age? Every child knows his name, you say Einstein, and heads go down, as if one has mentioned a Divine verdict.

WS: You're absolutely right. There is something very special here. I don't pretend to know that. But let me put it this way. There is something behind Einstein, and Einstein is a man I like very much. He was simple. He was unassuming and very odd, but a good man and a brilliant physicist, you just mentioned the year 1905, it was a record, the Brownian motion,³ the photo tactic effect and then on top of it all, relatively. But I will not have the chance to go into this issue because it would require years and years of study. There's something behind that. And in other words, Einstein is not alone. He is a mouthpiece of something. And I think the bottom line is that we can all guess. We can all guess of who stands ultimately behind the whole thing because Einsteinian physics has been a great boon to the neo-Nazism. I mean, for example, the evolutionist from his general theory of relativity. Evolutionism is practically a mathematical corollary. Incidentally, as I am sure you know, this Einsteinian astrophysics, which is evolutionist in its very mathematical structure, has been definitively disproved empirically, based upon the empirical results of the Plank 2009 satellite, this so called axis which lies in the plane of the ecliptic that would be absolutely impossible on an Einsteinian basis. Relativistic astrophysics has been disproved, but of course, the world does not acknowledge it. They just stop talking about that.

3. Reference here is to "Über die von der molekular-kinetischen Theorie der Wärme geforderte Bewegung von in ruhenden Flüssigkeiten suspendierten Teilchen" ("On the movement of small particles suspended in a stationary liquid demanded by the molecular-kinetic theory of heat"), published by Albert Einstein in 1905, proving the reality of atoms, which were first proposed in 1808 by John Dalton. It is one of the four groundbreaking papers Einstein published in 1905, in *Annalen der Physik*, in his so-called "miracle year".

MI: Do you see any connection between the rise of evolutionary outlook and Einstein's work or what came out of that particular worldview? Where is the connection between these two apparently distinct developments in the Western civilization? Of course, we are looking at these two to be product of a civilization. It's not individual. There is a whole civilizational current behind this because science ultimately is the activity of a civilization. In the Islamic civilization, science—which by the way, was the longest living scientific tradition, the enterprise of science in the Islamic civilization lasted 800 years, there is no other scientific enterprise that has this history—but my question is: when this modern scientific outlook appeared in the 17th century in the Western Civilization, it just took off due to whatever inner forces were working, but it just took off, so where do you see the convergence, if there is any, between the evolutionary Darwinian and post-Darwinian outlook and Einstein's worldview?

WS: Well, I think that so far as foundations go, it all points in the same direction. There are many ways of formulating it. One would be to say there are no absolutes, and that is to say the same thing as it there is no God.

MI: Meaning, everything is relative.

WS: Yes, I see everything is fundamentally as there are two realities—the great Reality and then the counter-reality. And this intellectual history that we are talking about exemplifies that great struggle and people, for the most part, are pawns in this game. I don't think that Einstein the man really originated anything. He was brilliant mathematical physicist of a unique stature, and he was used.

MI: It's similar to what we see in the political sphere, where the puppets are on the stage, they keep changing the names and faces, but forces behind them remain the same.

WS: You turn on the news and you have the feeling that you have already heard it. Right. But one thing I would like to point out, because it's not generally known, and I think it is of great interest, namely, as perhaps you know, I have all my life been a Platonist. And incidentally, also in my younger years, I was very much interested in the Vedic tradition, and I traveled to India, and I realized that the Platonist and the Vedic traditions are one and the same. There are few little differences, but fundamentally the same. There is a British Platonist of the 18th century, Thomas Taylor, whose writings are incredible.⁴ I don't know from where

4. Reference here to Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), the English Platonist who was the first to translate the complete works of Aristotle, Plato, Proclus, Porphyry, Apuleius, Ocellus Lucanus, Orphic fragments,

he got this knowledge, but he demonstrates that Platonism is also yogic in almost the same sense as a Vedic tradition. He writes in detail about photographers traveling to Egypt. Then he became a disciple of an Egyptian master and describes the daily life of Egyptian people. And when I read this description of how these people, including the young Pythagorean, lived, I said to myself, by God, this is what I saw in India, it is exactly the same thing.

The one point of difference—and it's significant—is that the Platonists and Pythagoreans were profoundly interested in geometry, not as we are interested in mathematics nowadays, but they recognized that geometry exists on the intermediary plane, on the psychic plane, but its truth comes from the aeiternal plane and therefore there is, in principle, a way of using geometry to ascend from the psychic to the aeiternal plane. This is a great challenge to the Vedic tradition. And in the Pythagorean and Platonist schools, they use geometry as a technical means and I found this very interesting. And incidentally, this is the only difference I see between the Platonist and the Vedic tradition, their Cosmology is one and the same, but so far as methodology is concerned, what distinguishes the Pythagoreans and Platonist, on the one hand, and the Vedic on the other, is the fact that they use geometry as the means *par excellence* of making the descent. And there's nothing like that in the Vedic tradition. But let me point out something that connects very much to our earlier conversation. Namely, both the Platonist and the Vedic tradition envisage a tripartite cosmos, which is, so to speak, the cosmic analog of the tripartition of man into corpus-spiritus-animus, there is a corresponding partition of the macrocosm. And what I have pointed out in my writings, is that this is not explicitly given in the Platonist or Vedic writings. I have pointed out that the aeiternal stratum is not subject either to space or time. The psychic is subject to time, but not to space. And then the corporeal is subject, of course, to both space and time. And I was amazed to see that the mere fact that there exists this intermediary plane, a time only world, this in itself disproves all of relativistic physics. It is gone.

MI: Right. This reminds me of *barzakh* in our tradition; it is the barrier between

and several other Neoplatonists and Pythagoreans. Most of the texts he translated were available since the 16th century, but he emended lacunae on the basis of his overall understanding of the Platonists worldview. His translations were influential; they provided imagery, ideas, and concepts to William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Wordsworth in England, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and G. R. S. Mead in the United States.

two things, brought about by means of the Power of God Himself, lasting from the time of death to Resurrection. Whoever dies enters it. *Barzakh* is a higher level of existence, beyond the confines and finitudes of material existence, including the grave, it is beyond the limitations of the means of death, and whether or not the physical body is buried or lost—everyone enters *barzakh* upon death, whereupon he or she starts another kind of life in which the virtuous are admitted to the station of *‘illiyīn*, while the wicked are assigned to *sijjīn*.⁵

WS: That is very interesting, I have not looked into it, but perhaps there is something similar about the dreams as well. We ordinary humans enter the intermediary plan in the dream state.

MI: Right.

WS: And when we see a dream castle, its spatial content is mere appearance. So there is no space in the intermediary plane, but its temporal bound is real. I was amazed the first time I went to India. On the second day, in fact, I had an encounter with a *faqīr* who gave me evidence that he could do two things. He could enter the intermediary plane and get things out, and he could also put things in. And I was so amazed to see in India that a *faqīr* who earned his livelihood by getting a few dollars from passersby, knew about cosmic mysteries that no one in our Institute for Advanced Study has any idea about. So the very existence of the intermediary plane rigorously disproves all of relativistic physics. This *faqīr* in New Delhi disproved Einstein rigorously.

MI: Returning to the foundational aspects of Evolution, I see two which perhaps we can talk about: the definition of species, which I find very fascinating because everyone in the Evolutionary camp remains vague about not only this, but all of the foundational definitions in their own system. Like, if you ask Richard Dawkins or anybody in that camp, what is the definition of species, they will come up with 30 different definitions of species. And this, even though their whole structure stands on the *origin of species*.

WS: That’s very interesting.

MI: So even at that level, at the foundational level, there is this huge confusion. And the second aspect, especially in reference to the human beings, which even some of the modern Muslim evolutionists find difficult to bypass because the Qur’ān specifically mentions the creation of the first human being—Ādam, upon him peace—who was made from clay and then breath was infused in him. The spirit is added to the clay. So,

5. Cf. Q 83:7-21, among other verses.

the recourse of the theistic evolutionists is to artificially separate the human being from the rest of the species and consider the first human as a complete and created being, but keep the rest of the evolutionary narrative. This subset, this artificial distinction makes such people an intermediary species, belonging neither to the evolutionary camp nor to the creationist, and that, in itself is perhaps a symbol of some kind. And all of this is what has already happened in the Christian tradition.

WS: Well, I think it is absolutely incontrovertible that from a traditional metaphysical vantage point, man is something categorically different from the animals. Exactly what that is, I don't feel competent to speculate about. But he is the only creature made in the image and likeness of God. And I think it takes a truly wise man to understand this correctly. I think this is way up there, this truth. And there is utter confusion about all these basic issues in today's scientific world. The great paradox is that whereas we live in an age where we are in a position to execute technological miracles, the world has never been as ignorant as it is now.

MI: That is very true. In fact, this binary which has emerged in our time, I mean that of evolutionism and creationism, it is a false binary, and it came out of the Christian creationism, which is tied to the six days of creation, young Earth and the rest of it, it has such a negative baggage attached to it. But the binary—as if these are only two possibilities left for us to conceive how life came into existence, how it all started! I find that rather ridiculous, but am interested in knowing you respond to this binary that has been set up as if there is no other possibility.

WS: I think at least in the Western world it is absolutely necessary at one point to distinguish between an esoteric and an exoteric level. I don't think this is equally true, say in the Platonist or the Vedic world, where religion is structured entirely in a different way. But in the Western world it is absolutely necessary to distinguish between these two levels. And I think one of the reasons that Christianity is not doing well in our times—there is a great deal of falling off, a great deal of harassment, confusion and even evil—is because in the Christian tradition, esoterism has been effectively outlawed.

MI: Right. That is sadly the case.

WS: In the Patristic Age you had great sages like St. Augustine, for example. He was a bishop. That means he could speak to simple, ordinary people and give them religious truths. But he also was an esoteric of the highest order and the two coexisted harmoniously. It was a perfect harmony in his *Confessions*, for example, which is readable by everyone. A delightful book. It relates how from a sinner he became a saint. Fascinating story.

But in that very book you will read passages that are quintessentially esoteric. And I'll just quote one of them to explain what I mean.

While speaking to God, Augustine says in Chapter X of his *Confessions*: “And I beheld the other things below Thee, and I perceived that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not, for they are, since they are from Thee, but are not, because they are not what Thou art. For that truly is which remains unchangeably. It is good then for me to hold fast unto God; for if I remain not in Him, I cannot in myself; but He remaining in Himself, reneweth all things. And Thou art the Lord my God, since Thou standest not in need of my goodness.”⁶ I love that statement.

MI: That reminds of al-Ghazālī.

WS: Everything was very harmonious in the Patristic era, but then, at the beginning of the 11th century, trouble began. And this, in fact, led to the division between the Roman and the Orthodox churches, which is very regrettable, like cutting a living body in half. It is good for neither side. And there was a lot of power concentrated in one man, which is always dangerous. And the upshot of the matter is that by the 19th century, esotericism no longer existed in the west. And this is one point on which I agree with Frithjoff Schuon, I disagree with him on many other points, but here I fully agree with him that a religion in the long run cannot survive without esoterism.

MI: That's right.

WS: That is absolutely true. And so we find now that Christianity is in a transitional phase. I don't know what will happen, but I do know that in the end it will come out right.

MI: Will come out right?

WS: Yes. Not, because of our doing. I think, it is a major point to bear in mind when we think about these kinds of problems. Because as I said, religion cannot survive without an esotericism. Do you see this also as true in Islam?

MI: Yes, very much so, because compared to the lack of esotericism in the routines of the daily life of a person immersed in the contemporary Western civilization, those who still live in the spiritual world of Islam begin their day with His remembrance and end with it. As between the appearance of the sun and its setting, there are five daily prayers, which—when prayed consciously—cast out the exoteric realm altogether. One

6. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, translated by Edward B. Pusey, D.D., Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1951, p. 154.

enters in the presence of the Divine while preparing to pray: washing the face, the hands, the feet—consciously literally cleaning us from the impact of the exoteric, and this happens five times a day. Every time, we enter that other space, which, as you know, is missing from the daily routines of those immersed in the contemporary Western civilization. I am saying this with the understanding that there may be people living in the West, who actually practice that kind of conscious return to the primordial, but in general, it is not the case. So, the experiential reality of an esoteric life is part of our daily routines and thereby the actual Speech of God, the Qurʾān, infuses in a Muslim's life a direct experience of the otherworldly esoteric dimension. One comes into contact with this through the Word, through the movements of the body, through the inner reorientation.

It is an experiential reality of immense impact. Sometimes, you come across a word in the Qurʾān, which you have read hundreds of times before, but suddenly something new emerges as a radiant light. You stop. That word, which one has read over and over for the last forty years, suddenly has a new meaning today. Just yesterday, I was talking to a friend, who referred to *shākila*, a word in the Qurʾān that opens up the entire reality of human condition: the nature of freedom we have and do not have, the question of free will. Of causation, of what happens to us in the womb of the mother, what is preordained, what is carried by the genetic code, the spiritual makeup with which we are born, and our Prophet told us that every child is born upon *fiṭra*, the primordial nature, imprinted deep in our being, acknowledging the reality of God. Every child coming into this world comes with this innate, this built-in recognition of the Divine and then parents and the influences start to diminish that polished mirror. And this is where the question of transcendence is very important. I think Schuon was both right and wrong in this respect: there is the transcendence of religions in the sense of their source being the one and the same, as all true religions come from one God, and Muslims believe in the prophets whom Christians believe in, they are all our prophets as well, and every Muslim is conscious of their presence in his or her daily life, we send salutations on Prophet Ibrāhīm throughout our day, but there are also essential differences between how Prophethood is understood in Islam and the contemporary Judeo-Christian theology.

In any case, it is the direct experiential contact with the esoteric on a daily basis that may still help Muslims survive the onslaught of materialism and exotericism, because even though most of the Muslim world has been secularized, that is a fact that can be verified objectively, and sadly so—

even the deepest deserts of Arabia, where nothing but the ancient sand existed until recently, is now dotted with modern technological hardware, even the most sacred place on earth has now been transformed, but still, one hopes there is something left of the esoteric in our lives to help us.

It is the onslaught of “tools”—all these gadgets which are now part of our lives—that have had the greatest impact on the daily routines. About twenty-five years ago I came across a statement by Werner Heisenberg, which really fascinated me, and to this day, it reminds me of his insight into this aspect of modernity. He wrote in 1958 that “one has to remember that every tool carries with it the spirit by which it has been created,” and he said that Western people will find it rather easy to cope with the new ideas since they have had time for a slow and gradual adjustment to the modern scientific methods of thinking. In other parts of the world these ideas would be confronted with the religious and philosophical foundations of native culture. Since it is true that the results of modern physics do touch such fundamental concepts as reality, space and time, the confrontation may lead to entirely new developments which cannot be foreseen.⁷

WS: Who said that?

MI: Heisenberg, Werner Heisenberg, his insight was true: tools carry the spirit of the inventor and when they arrive in a different civilization, they would cause havoc. We have seen this happen, even in the case of the cell phone... just this little device has disrupted centuries-old rhythms of life in the Muslim world, even in the heart of the most sacred place on earth, its presence has just created havoc in terms of what human beings are experiencing in that space. It is so sad to see this.

WS: Amazing. I would love to see that quote.

MI: I'll send it to you, insha Allah. He was so true. Because when these tools arrived, Muslims were unprepared to use them. Even now, traffic on most city streets in the Muslim world flows as if people are driving in a jampacked parking lot. This is because just a generation ago, these people were camel riders, camels had their own rules. Camels knew how to navigate in the deserts and people had learned how to navigate their journeys while riding on camels, but when the same people received cars, they had no clue how to navigate them on the newly constructed roads, so they tried to use what they knew of riding a camel. As a result, driving in fixed lanes did not come to them even though cars arrived because

7. . Heisenberg, Werner (1958, 1999), *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, Prometheus Books, New York, pp. 27-28.

they had money to buy them. So they drove on whichever space they saw and unlike camels, cars did not have any sense of other moving objects in the same space, hence roads became worse than parking lots and cities are clogged with traffic. Just because cars were invented elsewhere and as Heisenberg so wisely said, these tools for moving had unforeseeable consequences, and not just on the roads, but also on the psyche of people.

WS: That is fascinating.

MI: And the speed of destruction! One generation is riding camels and lives in tents, the next generation has filled its artificially constructed square houses with all the gadgets one can dream of! It took Western civilization three centuries to arrive at the destruction we see today, whereas it has taken Muslims just one generation to bring that destruction upon themselves.

WS: Sad.

MI: Yes. But our Prophet had told us that these camel riders will vie and compete with each other in the construction of tall buildings, and they are literally doing that; if one country builds a high tower, the other wants to build a few meters higher and they keep the height a secret; this may be unbelievable, but it is happening right in front of our eyes.

WS: Yes, it is very true. The modern world, by its very technological dependence, has a tremendous impact on the soul. I don't know what adjective to use. In a sense, it is spiritual, but in a bad sense. The very use of the Internet, for example. It has advantages, obviously, we are talking this morning using it, but there is a cost. A very cost; the price is really high.

MI: Huge.

WS: I think it has a big impact on not only on the psychological, but also on the spiritual life.

MI: Definitely.

WS: When I think, for example, my early experience of being in the Himalayan region, everything they used was somehow from the earth, which means that it had a double meaning. It had a physical and also a spiritual meaning. This has been lost. But I must say, when I was traveling in some parts of the Muslim world, and I saw these men praying five times a day, wherever they were, they just spread out their prayer rugs and prayed to God, I was deeply impressed. I was deeply impressed. And I began to feel that they seem to be stronger than we are, because they have not yet thrown overboard their spiritual heritage.

MI: When was that? When did you travel? How long ago was that?

WS: Very long ago. My first trip to India was in 1960.

MI: The world has changed a lot since then.

WS: Yes. I went to India six times. And usually on the way to India, I would stop in between. And this gave me glimpses of the Muslim world. And I can only say that when I saw these people forget everything and bow down before God, I was deeply impressed. It happened once when I was in a waiting room at an airport in London and there was an older man, and we were all sitting in this crowded waiting room, and at the appointed hour, he spread out his rug, and I could see that he is not aware of any of us anymore. We didn't matter. We didn't exist. It was just him and his God. And I thought that was very beautiful, and I had deep respect. And this we have lost in the West. There may be a few isolated individuals who live that way, but even in our churches, there's no such concept anymore.

MI: How do you keep hope in the face of this evil force? It is gaining more momentum by the day, as it were, with every new invention, with every new tool, it invades homes and lives, across the globe, one feels there is no sense of safety left anywhere, the scale and depth of destruction in a single lifetime that we have witnessed has not been witnessed in entire human history before. How do you personally hold on to hope? I mean, we believe in God and still have our inner strength, but outwardly, we have to deal with the realities of what has emerged and somehow find a counterforce.

WS: Along with so many other people, I would say most people who still adhere to their religion, I believe that we are heading into very difficult times. It's not the end of the world, but what in Christianity is often referred to as a chastisement. We have offended God in such a huge way that in God's justice, we will have to bear the consequences. I am confident that He is not yet ready to wipe out humanity, and God willing, in the end, there will be a victory. But we are heading into very difficult times.

MI: Do you see that acceleration as well? Acceleration of these difficult times, like even just during the last two decades, how the spread of darkness has been accelerating, spreading and conquering more territory, more hearts, more minds, more people. Do you see that?

WS: Yes, I think you're absolutely right. You know, it's like a stone rolling down a hill, getting ever faster. Gaining momentum.

MI: Yes, that is so true.

WS: And this is why a point will have to be reached where, as it were, God speaks.

MI: Right.

WS: So, I fully believe in this idea of a chastisement. I don't think it will be the end of the world, not yet, but it will be the end of a certain segment of civilization. We're not just going to go on and on and on, as we have been going for so many centuries. That is impossible.

MI: Right.

WS: And I believe that there would be much suffering that many people will not survive it. But God is in charge.

MI: Yes.

WS: All I can say, therefore, I am basically an optimist, but I think the civilization that we are now witnessing, at least part of that civilization, does not have long to go.

MI: Right. Martin Lings has this wonderful short book, *The Eleventh Hour*, a short book, but it contains a lucid passage about our times, which recounts a parable.

WS: He was a wonderful man.

MI: Very wonderful.

WS: And he was a wise man and a very good man.

MI: Yes, indeed, a wise and good man. His insights are even more penetrating than Schuon's, I find, and at a certain level of inner understanding of the contemporary realities, he had more experiences of the rapid destruction, of what he saw. He was in Egypt, and later, he used to go to Pakistan every year until the last year of his life. He had a group of followers there and he would go there, every year, just to be in their presence, for that special personal mutual companionship. The passage I am referring to is the parable of the vineyard. Lings quotes it from Matthew 20:1–16.⁸ The

8. "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he said unto them, "Why stand ye here idle all day long?" They said unto him, "Because no man hath hired

fact that the workers who worked only for the eleventh hour received the same wage as those who worked throughout the heat of the day, shows Divine mercy compensates for the human decadence. There is also a ḥadīth of the Prophet with a similar meaning;⁹ I will find the exact text and send it to you, but one thing is for sure: The darkness of our times did not inculcate a sense of doom in Martin Lings, rather, he saw hope in the very heart of darkness: “The present age, moreover, assists the spiritual seeker indirectly, through the very momentum generated by its frenetic activity as it approaches its final throes; the very pull of the Hour

us.” He said unto them, “Go ye also into the vineyard.”

And when evening came, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, “Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.” And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received—every man a shilling. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, “These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he answered and said to one of them, “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matthew xx: 1-16)

9. “Your life in comparison to the lifespan of the previous nations is like the period between [the time] of the *‘aṣr* (afternoon) prayer and sunset... Your similitude and that of the People of the two Books is like a man who hired laborers and said to them: “Who will work for me until mid-day for one *qirāt* each?”

So the Jews worked until mid-day for one *qirāt* each.

Then the man said: “Who will work for me from mid-day until the *‘aṣr* prayer for one *qirāt* each?”

The Christians worked from mid-day until the *‘aṣr* prayer for one *qirāt* each.

Then the man said: “Who will work for me from the *‘aṣr* prayer until the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer for two *qirāt* each?”

And that, in truth, is all of you. Truly you have double the wages. The Jews and the Christians became angry and said: “We did more labor but received less wages!” [Allah] said: “Have I decreased you in what was rightly yours?” They said, “No.” Then He said: “This is My blessing, which I give to whom I wish.” (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Ijāra, ijāra ilā niṣf al-naḥār; al-Tawḥīd, qawl Allāh ta’ālā *qul ja’tū bil-tawrati jallūhā*)

can be harnessed to spiritual aspiration, even after one has passed from the market to the vineyard... the liberating efforts of intelligence and will that are thus called into action may be prolonged, after the vineyard has been reached, to add their momentum, combined with that of the eleventh hour itself, to the “work”, that is, to the spiritual path.”¹⁰

WS: I have never heard that. I was always puzzled by this parable. I feel there is even more in that parable than what I now understand.

MI: Sometimes we have an experience, a real experience, like we are living in the time when the Prophet was actually walking and talking on the streets. We want to be in his presence every single day. I long for that time when I could have been there in his presence, in his personal presence. And this parable somehow brings us into that spiritual presence, a kind of transformation that one feels in the inner most recesses of one’s being, a kind of clarity, like what I imagine was brought to the Companions who saw, met, and talked to the last of the Prophets to be sent to Earth; his very presence must have created an esoteric reality for those people who believed in him, who lived with him, who actually saw him, their toiling and their struggle was easier than those who came later, because of the luminosity of the Prophetic light; that light was amidst them, and it started to diminish—in a certain sense—after his demise, and it decreases day after day after day. Therefore, God in his just Mercy decreed a compensation, He knew that 1400 years later, this slave of mine, this devotee of mine will be struggling, will have more difficulties in his dealings with more darkness, so he compensates for the dimness of the Prophetic light, the dimness is only in one sense, for at another level, it never dimmed, it will never dim, it will remain as it ever was, the Muḥammadan reality is transcendent, above time and space, but in a way, in this continuation of our human journey, we are facing this darkness and the evolutionary narrative is just one aspect of this darkness, because we are entering more and more into this outer darkness, we need more and more of the inner luminosity.

WS: Yes, like that.

MI: All Prophets had that luminosity, Jesus Christ, himself, just to be in his presence, just imagine, like, the light that came out of him, the light that came off every Prophet, that light, that luminosity, the physical, actual presence, is no more possible as we move further and further away, yet, it is possible to enter that sphere at a different level, even though it is harder and harder to access.

10. *The Eleventh Hour* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987), p.12.

WS: Yes. I believe very much that it is very necessary on a worldwide basis to develop a right understanding on the part of religiously oriented people, of not only their own religion, of course, but also of other religions. Obviously, our understanding of other religions is limited by the fact that we are not part of that religion, but at the very least, I think, it is imperative that our false ideas should be discarded if we don't know anything, at the very least, let us not have a false idea. And also, I think, one needs to avoid both of two extremes. One extreme is what was in older times it was so common to look at other religions as somehow inferior or demonic, or what you will. It was an *a priori* negative feeling towards other religions. This has to go. But the other extreme also has to go. The other extreme, the transcendent unity of all religions.

MI: Exactly. I agree. This is the book I was referring to, Schuon's *Transcendent Unity of Religions*; this is, in fact, pseudo transcendence; it is so empty of meaning and substance.

WS: I wrote the book, as a matter of fact, last year, in which I deal with the Vedanta and Christianity, and I argue that they have much in common, but also in their eschaton, there is almost an antipolar opposition. What is it that they have in common? It is the ethics declared by the Christ and the ethics that Siri Krishna instructs Uddhava; they are the same ethics. When Uddhava asks Siri Krishna what is the sign that you have perfected Yoga, he says, you have attained perfection in yoga when you regard the pain and pleasure of all creatures as you regard your own. This is true of the Vedas, as it is true of Christianity. Identical ethics. But when it comes to the question of eschaton, the Vedic eschaton is unquestionably what I call the neutronic, there is a blowing out of the candle frame, and we are that candle flame, we as human beings. And this is the opposite to the eschaton given to us by Christ, because even the physical body is said to be resurrected. And this is a mystery which almost everyone says is too much. But from a Platonist point of view, it is comprehensible. So this is a purely esoteric idea and so, in this little book, I conclude that both of these religions are true because they are given by God, but they're not the same religion, they have the same ethics, but their eschaton are antipolar. And I find that basic concepts or terms of the Judeo-Christian tradition are completely absent in the Vedas. The Vedas were there before Abraham was born. And I was amazed, for example, the idea of Adam and the Fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. There's nothing like that in the Vedas. In fact, there's no Sanskrit word, even for sin. So I realized that this idea that our religions are more or less different ways to the same summit, it is a heresy. It is absolutely a heresy and a dangerous one because it impedes our understanding of any religion, beginning

with our own. As long as we think like that, we have placed ourselves in a point of vantage where we cannot understand anything.

MI: That's very true. And that brings us to a point where I hope that this commonality, this need for all religious people at different spiritual, intellectual, social levels, everywhere, to have at least some common strategy, some common platform, a common way of correcting we cannot correct individually. If nothing else, just holding the mirror may be an important step so that the place toward which we are racing becomes clearer, so that the elephant's foot now dragging everyone to that unfathomable horror pit is visible to all. So I hope we can continue these conversations and build some kind of platform, at least at the spiritual and intellectual levels, to work together.

WS: I am very happy Dr. Iqbal, that we had this opportunity to exchange ideas and, God willing, we shall meet again, if ever by any chance you happen to be traveling to California, please do come for a visit; it's such a pleasure.

MI: Inshallah, I'll try. God willing, we shall meet soon. Thank you very much.

WS: Thank you so much.