

ĀYATULLĀH RŪHULLĀH KHUMAYNĪ  
(1900–1979)

After completing his studies at Qum, a major center of religious learning in Iran, under Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karīm Hā’iri Yazdī, the Āyatullāh Khumaynī taught philosophy, ethics, and law. In 1963, he emerged as a critic of the Shah in his sermons at the Faydiya Madrasa (religious school) in Qum. The Āyatullāh Khumaynī was arrested and from 1964 lived in exile, fifteen years in Iraq and later France. He became a symbol for and leader of the opposition movement. In February 1979, the Āyatullāh Khumaynī returned to Teheran to establish the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## Islamic Government

In the name of God, the merciful and the compassionate, whose help we seek. God, lord of the universe, be thanked and God’s prayers be upon Muhammad, the best of mankind, and upon all his kinsmen.

### FOREWORD

The Governance of the Jurisprudent is a clear scientific idea that may require no proof in the sense that whoever knows the laws and beliefs can see its axiomatic nature. But the condition of the Muslim society, and the condition of our religious academies in particular, has driven this issue away from the minds and it now needs to be proven again.

Since its inception, the Islamic movement was afflicted with the Jews when they started their counter-activity by distorting the reputation of Islam, by assaulting it and by slandering it. This has continued to our present day. Then came the role of groups that can be considered more evil than the devil and his troops. This role emerged in the colonialist activity which dates back to more than three centuries ago. The colonists found in the Muslim world their long-sought object. To achieve their colonialist ambitions, the colonists sought to create the right conditions leading to the annihilation of Islam. They did not seek to turn the Muslims into Christians after driving them away from Islam because they do not believe in either. They wanted control and domination because they were constantly aware during the Crusades wars that the biggest obstacle preventing them from attaining their goals and putting their political plans on the brink of an abyss was Islam with its law and beliefs and with the influence it exerted

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on people through their faith. This is why they treated Islam unjustly and harbored ill intentions toward it. The hands of the missionaries, the orientals and of the information media—all of whom are in the service of the colonialist countries—have cooperated to distort the facts of Islam in a manner that has caused many people, especially the educated among them, to steer away from Islam and to be unable to find a way to reach Islam.

Islam is the religion of the strugglers who want right and justice, the religion of those demanding freedom and independence and those who do not want to allow the infidels to dominate the believers.

But the enemies have portrayed Islam in a different light. They have drawn from the minds of the ordinary people a distorted picture of Islam and implanted this picture even in the religious academies. The enemies’ aim behind this was to extinguish the flame of Islam and to cause its vital revolutionary character to be lost, so that the Muslims would not think of seeking to liberate themselves and to implement all the rules of their religion through the creation of a government that guarantees their happiness under the canopy of an honorable human life.

They have said that Islam has no relationship whatsoever with organizing life and society or with creating a government of any kind and that it only concerns itself with the rules of menstruation and childbirth. It may contain some ethics. But beyond this, it has no bearing on issues of life and of organizing society. It is regrettable that all this has had its bad effect not only on the ordinary people but also among college people and the students of theology. They misunderstand Islam and are ignorant of it. Islam has become as strange to them as alien people. It has become difficult for the missionary to familiarize people with Islam. On the other hand, there stands a line of the agents of colonialism to drown Islam with clamor and noise.

So that we may distinguish the reality of Islam from what people have come to know about it, I would like to draw your attention to the disparity between the Qur’ān and the *hadīth* books on the one hand and the (theological) theses on the other hand. The Qur’ān and the *hadīth* books, which are the most important sources of legislation, are clearly superior to the theses written by religious interpreters and legists because the Qur’ān and the *hadīth* books are comprehensive and cover all aspects of life. The Qur’ān phrases concerned with society’s affairs are many times the phrases concerned with private worship. In any of the detailed *hadīth* books, you can hardly find more than three or four chapters concerned with regulating man’s private worship and man’s relationship with God and few chapters dealing with ethics. The rest is strongly connected with social and economic affairs, with human rights, with administration and with the policy of societies. . . .

What we are suffering from currently is the consequence of that misleading propaganda whose perpetrators got what they wanted and which has required us to exert a large effort to prove that Islam contains principles and rules for the formation of government.

This is our situation. The enemies have implanted these falsehoods in the minds of people in cooperation with their agents, have ousted Islam's judiciary and political laws from the sphere of application and have replaced them by European laws in contempt of Islam for the purpose of driving it away from society. They have exploited every available opportunity for this end. . . . In the prophet's time, was the church separated from the state? Were there at the time theologians and politicians? At the time of the caliphs and the time of 'Alī, the Amīr of the faithful, was the state separated from the church? Was there an agency for the church and another for the state?

The colonialists and their lackeys have made these statements to isolate religion from the affairs of life and society and to tacitly keep the '*ulamā*' of Islam away from the people, and drive people away from the '*ulamā*' because the '*ulamā*' struggle for the liberation and independence of the Muslims. When their wish of separation and isolation is realized, the colonialists and their lackeys can take away our resources and rule us. I tell you that if our sole concern is to pray, to implore and mention God and never go beyond, colonialism and all the agencies of aggression will never oppose us. Pray as you wish and call for prayer as you wish and let them take what God has given you. The final account is to God and God is the only source of strength and might. When we die our reward will come from God—if this is our thinking, then we have nothing to be concerned with or to fear. . . .

#### Need for Continued Implementation of Laws

. . . Because Islam is immortal, it must be implemented and observed forever. If what was permissible by Muhammad is permissible until the day of resurrection and what was forbidden by Muhammad is forbidden to the day of resurrection, then Muhammad's restrictions must not be suspended, his teachings must not be neglected, punishment must not be abandoned, tax collection must not be stopped and defense of the nation of the Muslims and of their lands must not be abandoned. The belief that Islam came for a limited period and for a certain place violates the essentials of the Islamic beliefs. Considering that the implementation forever of laws after the venerable prophet, may God's prayers be upon him, is one of the essentials of life, then it is necessary for government to exist and for this government to have the qualities of an executive and administrative authority. Without this, social chaos, corruption and ideological and moral deviation would prevail. This can be prevented only through the creation of a just government that runs all aspects of life.

### ISLAMIC SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

#### Distinction from Other Political Systems

The Islamic government is not similar to the well-known systems of government. It is not a despotic government in which the head of state dictates

his opinion and tampers with the lives and property of the people. The prophet, may God's prayers be upon him, and 'Alī, the Amīr of the faithful, and the other Imāms<sup>1</sup> had no power to tamper with people's property or with their lives. The Islamic government is not despotic but constitutional. However, it is not constitutional in the well-known sense of the word, which is represented in the parliamentary system or in the people's councils. It is constitutional in the sense that those in charge of affairs observe a number of conditions and rules underlined in the Qur'ān and in the Sunna and represented in the necessity of observing the system and of applying the dictates and laws of Islam. This is why the Islamic government is the government of the divine law. The difference between the Islamic government and the constitutional governments, both monarchic and republican, lies in the fact that the people's representatives or the king's representatives are the ones who codify and legislate, whereas the power of legislation is confined to God, may He be praised, and nobody else has the right to legislate and nobody may rule by that which has not been given power by God. This is why Islam replaces the legislative council [branch] by a planning council that works to run the affairs and work of the ministries so that they may offer their services in all spheres.

All that is mentioned in the book (Qur'ān) and in the Sunna is acceptable and obeyed in the view of the Muslims. This obedience facilitates the state's responsibilities, however when the majorities in the constitutional monarchic or republican governments legislate something, the government has to later exert efforts to compel people to obey, even if such obedience requires the use of force.

The Islamic government is the government of the law and God alone is the ruler and the legislator. God's rule is effective among all the people and in the state itself. All individuals—the prophet, his successors and other people—follow that Islam, which descended through revelation and which God had explained through the Qur'ān and through the words of His prophet, and has legislated for them.

The venerable prophet, may God's peace and prayers be upon him, was appointed ruler on earth by God so that he may rule justly and not follow whims. God addressed the prophet through revelation and told him to convey what was revealed to him to those who would succeed him. The prophet obeyed the dictates of this order and appointed 'Alī, the Amīr of the faithful, as his successor. He was not motivated in this appointment by the fact that 'Alī was his son-in-law and the fact that 'Alī had performed weighty and unforgettable services but because God ordered the prophet to do so.

Yes, government in Islam means obeying the law and making it the judge. The powers given to the prophet, may God's peace and prayers be

1. Imām: For Shī'ites, the Imām is the successor of the prophet Muhammad and thus the religio-political leader of the Islamic community. Ithnā' 'Asharite (Twelver) Shī'i Islam recognizes twelve Imāms who are descendants of Muhammad through 'Alī, his son-in-law and first Imām.

upon him, and to the legitimate rulers after him are powers derived from God. God ordered that the prophet and the rulers after him be obeyed: "Obey the prophet and those in charge among you." There is no place for opinions and whims in the government of Islam. The prophet, the Imāms and the people obey God's will and *Shari'a*.

The *Shari'a* and reason require us not to let governments have a free hand. The proof of this is evident. The persistence of these governments in their transgressions means obstructing the system and laws of Islam whereas there are numerous provisions that describe every non-Islamic system as a form of idolatry and a ruler or an authority in such a system as a false god. We are responsible for eliminating the traces of idolatry from our Muslim society and for keeping it away from our life. At the same time, we are responsible for preparing the right atmosphere for bringing up a faithful generation that destroys the thrones of false gods and destroys their illegal powers because corruption and deviation grow on their hands. This corruption must be wiped out and erased and the severest punishment must be inflicted upon those who cause it. In his venerable book, God describes Pharaoh as "a corrupter." Under the canopy of a pharonic rule that dominates and corrupts society rather than reform it, no faithful and pious person can live abiding by and preserving his faith and piety. Such a person has before him two paths, and no third to them: either be forced to commit sinful acts or rebel against and fight the rule of false gods, try to wipe out or at least reduce the impact of such a rule. We only have the second path open to us. We have no alternative but to work for destroying the corrupt and corrupting systems and to destroy the symbol of treason and the unjust among the rulers of peoples.

This is a duty that all Muslims wherever they may be are entrusted—a duty to create a victorious and triumphant Islamic political revolution.

#### Need for Islamic Unity

On the other hand, colonialism has partitioned our homeland and has turned the Muslims into peoples. When the Ottoman State appeared as a united state, the colonialist sought to fragment it. The Russians, the British and their allies united and fought the Ottomans and then shared the loot, as you all know. We do not deny that most rulers of the Ottoman State lacked ability, competence and qualifications and many of them ruled the people in a despotic monarchic manner. However, the colonialists were afraid that some pious and qualified persons would, with the help of the people, assume leadership of the Ottoman State and (would safeguard) its unity, ability, strength and resources, thus dispersing the hopes and aspirations of the colonialists. This is why as soon as World War I ended, the colonialists partitioned the country into mini-states and made each of these mini-states their agent. Despite this, a number of these mini-states later escaped the grip of colonialism and its agents.

The only means that we possess to unite the Muslim nation, to liberate its lands from the grip of the colonialist and to topple the agent governments of colonialism, is to seek to establish our Islamic government. The efforts of this government will be crowned with success when we become able to destroy the heads of treason, the idols, the human images and the false gods who disseminate injustice and corruption on earth.

The formation of a government is then for the purpose of preserving the unity of the Muslims after it is achieved. . . .

#### Need for Rescuing Wronged and Deprived

To achieve their unjust economic goals, the colonialists employed the help of their agents in our countries. As a result of this, there are hundreds of millions of starving people who lack the simplest health and educational means. On the other side, there are individuals with excessive wealth and broad corruption. The starving people are in a constant struggle to improve their conditions and to free themselves from the tyranny of the aggressive rulers. But the ruling minorities and their government agencies are also seeking to extinguish this struggle. On our part, we are entrusted to rescue the deprived and the wronged. We are instructed to help the wronged and to fight the oppressors, as the Amīr of the faithful ('Alī) instructed his two sons in his will: "Fight the tyrant and aid the wronged."

The Muslim '*ulamā*' are entrusted to fight the greedy exploiters so that society may not have a deprived beggar and, on the other side, someone living in comfort and luxury and suffering from gluttony. . . .

The opinion of the Shī'ī concerning the one who is entitled to lead the people is known since the death of the prophet and until the time of the disappearance (of the Shī'ite leader). To the Shī'ī the Imām is a virtuous man who knows the laws and implements them justly and who fears nobody's censure in serving God.

#### Ruler in Time of Absence

If we believe that the laws concerning the establishment of the Islamic government are still present and that the *Shari'a* denounces chaos, then we must form the government. Reason dictates that this is necessary, especially if an enemy surprises us or if an aggressor who must be fought and repelled attacks us. The *Shari'a* has ordered us to prepare for them all the force that we can muster to scare God's enemy and our enemy, and it encourages us to retaliate against those who attack us with whatever they attack us. Islam also calls for doing the wronged justice, for wrenching his rights and for deterring the unjust. All this requires strong agencies. As for the expenses of the government that is to be formed for the service of the people—the entire people—these expenses come from the treasury house, whose revenues consist of the land tax, the one-fifth tax and the tax levied on Jews and Christians and other resources.



Now, in the time of absence, there is no provision for a certain person to manage the state affairs. So what is the opinion? Should we allow the laws of Islam to continue to be idle? Do we persuade ourselves to turn away from Islam or do we say that Islam came to rule people for a couple of centuries and then to neglect them? Or do we say that Islam has neglected to organize the state? We know that the absence of the government means the loss and violation of the bastions of the Moslems and means our failure to gain our right and our land. Is this permitted in our religion? Isn't the government one of the necessities of life? Despite the absence of a provision designating an individual to act on behalf of the Imām in the case of his absence, the presence of the qualities of the religious ruler in any individual still qualify him to rule the people. These qualities, which are knowledge of the law and justice, are available in most of our jurists in this age. If they decide, it will be easy for them to create and establish a just government unequalled in the world.

### Rule of Jurisprudent

If a knowledgeable and just jurist undertakes the task of forming the government, then he will run the social affairs that the prophet used to run and it is the duty of the people to listen to him and obey him.

This ruler will have as much control over running the people's administration, welfare and policy as the prophet and Amīr of the faithful had despite the special virtues and the traits that distinguished the prophet and the Imām. Their virtues did not entitle them to contradict the instructions of the *Shari'a* or to dominate people with disregard to God's order. God has given the actual Islamic government that is supposed to be formed in the time of absence (of Caliph 'Alī ibn Abi Tālib) the same powers that he gave the prophet and the Amīr of the faithful in regard to ruling, justice and the settlement of disputes, the appointment of provincial rulers and officers, the collection of taxes and the development of the country. All that there is to the matter is that the appointment of the ruler at present depends on (finding) someone who has both knowledge and justice.

### The Rule of the Jurisprudent (*wilāyat i-faqīh*)<sup>2</sup>

The above-mentioned must not be misunderstood and nobody should imagine that the fitness of the jurist for rule raises him to the status of prophecy or of Imāms because our discussion here is not concerned with status and rank but with the actual task. The rule here means governing the

2. *Wilāyat i-faqīh* (Guidance of the jurist): During the absence (*ghaybat*) of the Imām and a formal Islamic government, Shī'ī political theory developed the belief that the jurist(s) should provide guidance (*wilāyat*) for the Islamic community. Shī'ī religious leaders differ significantly in their interpretations. For Āyatullāh Shari'atmadārī *et al.*, the jurists provide moral guidance. For Āyatullāh Khumaynī *wilāyat* means governance itself by an individual *faqīh* who assures Shari'ah rule.

people, running the state and applying the laws of the *Shari'a*. This is a hard task under which those qualified for it buckle without being raised above the level of men. In other words, rule means the government, the administration and the country's policy and not, as some people imagine, a privilege or a favor. It is a practical task of extreme significance.

The rule of the jurist is a subjective matter dictated by the *Shari'a*, as the *Shari'a* considers one of us a trustee over minors. The task of a trustee over an entire people is not different from that of the trustee over minors, except quantitatively. If we assume that the prophet and the Imām had been trustees over minors, their task in this respect would not have been very different quantitatively and qualitatively from the task of any ordinary person designated as a trustee over those same minors. Their trusteeship over the entire nation is not different practically from the trusteeship of any knowledgeable and just jurist in the time of absence.

If a just jurist capable of establishing the restrictions is appointed, would he establish the restrictions in a manner different from that in which they were established in the days of the prophet or of the Amīr of the faithful? Did the prophet punish the unmarried fornicator more than one hundred lashes? Does the jurist have to reduce the number to prove that there is a difference between them and the prophet? No, because the ruler, be he a prophet, an Imām or a just jurist, is nothing but an executor of God's order and will.

The prophet collected taxes: The one-fifth tax, the alms tax, the tax on the Christians and the Jews and the land tax. Is there a difference between what the prophet and the Imām collected and what the present-day jurist should collect?

God made the prophet the ruler of all the faithful and his rule included even the individual who was to succeed him. After the prophet, the Imām became the ruler. The significance of their rule is that their legal orders applied to all and that the appointment of, control over and, when necessary, dismissal of judges and provincial rulers was in their hands.

The jurist has this same rule and governance with one difference—namely that the rule of the jurist over other jurists is not so that he can dismiss them because the jurists in the state are equal in terms of competence.

Therefore, the jurists must work separately or collectively to set up a legitimate government that establishes the strictures, protects the borders and establishes order. If competence for this task is confined to one person, then this would be his duty to do so corporeally, otherwise the duty is shared equally. In case it is impossible to form that government, the rule does not disappear.

The jurists have been appointed by God to rule and the jurist must act as much as possible and in accordance with his assignment. He must collect the alms tax, the one-fifth tax, the land tax and the tax

from Christians and Jews, if he can, so that he may spend all this in the interest of the Muslims. If he can, he must implement the divine strictures. The temporary inability to form a strong and complete government does not at all mean that we should retreat. Dealing with the needs of the Muslims and implementing among them whatever laws are possible to implement is a duty as much as possible.

## ANWAR IBRAHIM

1947–

A Malaysian religious and political activist and intellectual, he established the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) in 1972, a social movement and organization that pressed for Islamization of Malaysian life, educational reform, and social justice. He became the most influential youth leader and political activist in Malaysia and a prominent Muslim leader internationally. He joined the ruling UMNO party (United Malays National Organization) in 1983 and quickly went on to hold a series of cabinet-level positions, culminating in his becoming Deputy Prime Minister. In 1998 he was removed from power by the Prime Minister and tried for sedition and corruption. His trial and conviction drew international attention as well as criticism from human rights organizations and many international leaders. In 2004, his conviction was overturned and he was released.

## The Need for Civilizational Dialogue

In all the literary traditions of mankind, the love story is the most enduring, for love brings forth the best, and also the worst in man. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare rends our hearts with the story of love's entanglement with loyalty. Anguished by the acrimony and bitterness of the family feud, Juliet is prepared to forsake her family for love:

Deny thy father, and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

In the encounter between the civilizations of the East and the West, generations of the intelligentsia from the East—the Muslims, the Hindus, the Confucianists—have been caught in an equally tormenting predicament, a predicament of a different kind yet more profound and far-reaching: whether to remain loyal to one's traditions or to depart for a way of life perceived as superior. They generally fall into two distinct categories. There were those who forswore everything from the West because of their passionate and tenacious hold on everything from their own traditions. And then there were those who, overwhelmed by the dazzling light of Western civilization, became renegades to condemn their own.

From *The Need for Civilizational Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Occasional Paper Series, 1995), pp. 1–5.

AYATOLLAH MOHAMMAD KHATAMI  
1942–

He was born into a clerical family in Ardakan in central Iran; his father was the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khatami. After religious studies in Qom, Khatami entered the University of Isfahan in 1965 to study philosophy, followed in 1969 by graduate studies in education at the University of Teheran. Two years later, he returned to Qom to pursue further religious studies in Islamic law, jurisprudence, and philosophy. In Qom he became more immersed in political activity. In 1978, on the eve of the Iranian revolution, he was chosen to lead the Hamburg Islamic Institute in Germany, which played a pivotal role in organizing revolutionary activity among the Iranian diaspora. From 1982 to 1992, he served as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and then in 1992 he was appointed assistant to Iran's President and head of the National Library of Iran. He was elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on May 23, 1997, with over two-thirds of the popular vote and reelected for a second term in 2001. He has published several books and articles, including *Islam, Liberty and Development* and *From the City-World to the World-City*.

## Dialogue Between East and West

The phrase 'dialogue among civilizations and cultures', which should be interpreted as conversing with other civilizations and cultures, is based upon a definition of truth which is not necessarily at odds with the well-known definitions of truth that one finds in philosophical texts. Dialogue among civilizations requires listening to and hearing from other civilizations and cultures, and the importance of listening to others is by no means less than talking to others. It may be in fact more important.

Talking and listening create a conversation; one side addresses the other side, and speech is exchanged. . . . The world of science is not the world of speeches and addresses. . . . But the world of art and the world of religion are the world of addressing. We are addressed by a work of art, and in religion, words of God address man. That is why the languages of mysticism and religion are linked together by genuine and profound ties, and why the earliest specimens of art that have been created by man are also specimens of Sacred Art. Man is addressed again and again in the Bible and in the Holy Quran, and it is with this call that the individual human being is elevated and becomes a person. . . .

Text of an address to the European University Institute, Florence, on March 10, 1999.

[T]he important point here is that in the concept of religious address, when man is being addressed by God on a general and universal level, and not in specific terms of religious teaching and codes of conduct, none of his psychological, social or historical aspects are really being addressed. What is addressed is man's true, non-historic and individual nature, and that is why all the divine religions are not quintessentially different. The differences arise from religious laws and codes of conduct that govern the social and judicial life of human beings.

Now we must ask ourselves who is this person that is being addressed.

Recounting the fascinating story of philosophical anthropology, and the episodes dealing with self-knowledge and self-discovery, would take several long nights in the Thousand and One Nights of the history of philosophy. Some of these tales were first told in the East and some originated in the West. It is significant to note that the Eastern tales explain the Oriental side of man's being while the Western tales reveal the properties of his Occidental side. Man is in fact the meeting point of the soul's East and the reason's West. Denying the existence of any part of his essence would impair our understanding of the significance of his being. In our effort to grasp the meaning of the person, we should watch out not to fall into the trap of individualism, or into that of collectivism. Even though the views expressed by Christian thinkers have helped the modern concept of the individual to crystallize, this should not be taken to mean that there exists a natural link between the two views. Just as the profound attention focused on the meaning of the person as the recipient of the Divine Word should not be credited, in my view, to the influence of personalism. Of course, it has been said by everyone that in modern society, it is individual human beings who are the criterion and the yardstick for all institutions, laws and social relations, and that civil rights and human rights are in fact nothing other than the rights of this same individual. On the other hand, collectivism, which was launched vis-à-vis individualism, was formulated by multiplying the same concept of the individual, and therefore the two ideologies have the same philosophical foundation. For this reason we consider, from our position of spiritual wisdom, the antagonism between individualistic liberalism and collectivist socialism to be superficial and incidental. The concept of the person can be easily explained in terms of Islamic mysticism. The Islamic mystics consider man to be a world unto himself, a microcosm. Man's originality does not emanate from his individuality or his collectivity. His originality is solely due to the fact that it is him, and him alone, who is addressed by the Divine Call. With this address, man's soul transcends its boundaries, and with the transcendence of his soul, his world also becomes a world of justice and humanity.

Anyone who examines even briefly the meandering course of philosophy from its beginnings to the present will clearly notice the continuous swing of the philosophers, from one extreme to the other. The last swing,



the last link in the chain, is modernity. This word, which seemingly is the latest term to be derived from the Latin *modernus*, was apparently first used in the nineteenth century. But the Latin word itself has been in use for more than fifteen centuries, and it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that modernity was applied to a wide range of concepts in such diverse fields as philosophy, art, science, history and ethics. The common denominator in all these concepts is the cataclysm that shook the very foundations of man's existence and thinking towards the end of the Middle Ages. It was a cataclysm that pushed man and the world into a new orbit. Man and the contemporary world (so far as it is affected by man's ideas) result from this modern orbit into which they were sent in the aftermath of the Middle Ages. This new orbit was labelled 'modern' in those times, but today we call it the Renaissance. Italy played a decisive role in the birth of the Renaissance. Although many books and essays have been written to describe and explain this great milestone, there is still a definite need for philosophers, historians and scientists to think and talk about it.

The sole aim of the Renaissance was not to revive classical Greek culture. Its principal aim was—as already pointed out by a number of thinkers—to revitalize religion by giving it a new language and fresh ideas. The Renaissance defined the man of religion not as someone who would contemptuously turn his back on the world in order to repress it, but as somebody who would face the world. The Renaissance man of religion turns to the world just as the world awaits him with open arms, and this reciprocal openness and opening up of the world and man constitute the most fundamental point about the Renaissance, and inherently it is a religious event aimed at conserving, reforming and propagating religion, and not opposed to it or against it.

But this great event ended up, in due course, somewhere diametrically opposed to the original intention. The opening of the world was transformed into violent conquest and subjugation. This violent conquest did not remain limited to mastering nature. Its fires soon spread to human communities. What came to be known in the socio-political history of Europe as colonialism is the result of extending the domineering attitude of man towards nature and the natural sciences, to men—modernity without adopting a humanitarian and ethical approach.

The critique of modernity that I propose is undertaken from a vantage point and angle which are profoundly different from the position of its well-known critics, especially in the domain of philosophy. Someone who sets out to prune a tree should not cut the very branch he is standing on. That is exactly how some of the philosophers of our time are behaving in their critique of modernity. By denying Reason any dialectical authority, they turn it either into a weapon that destroys everyone and everything, itself included, or transform it into a blunt and rusted sword that can only become a museum piece. One cannot use Reason as a critical weapon without accepting its authority and without recognizing its limits.

The critique of pure reason, which opened a new chapter in Western philosophy and may be taken to mean the critique of everything and all concepts including pure reason itself, only becomes possible if reason is endowed with authority. Without the authority of reason—which should be discussed at length and with precision in some other venue and at a more appropriate time, without forgetting to discuss its relationship to domination and power—it will not be possible to have a clear picture and concept of such vital political issues as human rights, peace, justice and freedom. And without this clear concept, our efforts for the establishment of these ideals will not succeed. But this should not be interpreted as a call to rationality and European style logocentrism that preceded post-modernism. Because of the fact that Europe has given birth to modern rationality, it should feel a stronger responsibility for criticizing it and finding a solution to prevent its destructive consequences.

Europe has itself fallen prey to its over-reliance on rationality, and is today engaged, through its thinkers and philosophers, in totally discrediting its own rationality. The Orient, which etymologically speaking has given rise to a number of words pertaining to order and a sense of direction, can undertake, in the course of a historical dialogue with the West aimed at reaching a mutual understanding, to call on Europe and America to exercise more equilibrium, serenity, and contemplation in their conduct, thus contributing to the establishment of peace, security and justice in the world.

The exuberance and vitality of European culture stem from its critical approach towards everything, itself included. But the time has come for Europe to take another step forward and view itself differently, as others see it. This should not be taken to mean that Europe should forget its great cultural heritage or that it should turn to a new type of obscurantism. It is rather an encouragement to European culture and civilization to embark on new experiences to gain a more precise knowledge of global cultural geography. In Orientalism, we find that the East is treated as an object of study, rather than as 'the other side' of a dialogue. For a real dialogue among civilizations to take place, it is imperative that the East should become a real participant in the discussions and not just remain an object of study.

This is a very important step that Europe and America need to take towards the realization of the 'dialogue-among-civilizations' project. Of course this is not a one-way invitation. We too, as Iranians, as Muslims and as Asians, need to take major steps towards gaining a true knowledge of the West, as it really is. This knowledge will help us to improve our economic and social way of life. Taking such bold steps by us and by Europeans would require a character trait that was first recognized and promoted in Europe by the Italians.

Renaissance historians have written that as a result of the continuous contacts of the Italians with Byzantium and the Islamic world, the people of Italy developed a sense of tolerance. The Italians had been familiar with Islamic civilization since the time of the Crusades, and they admired it.

Speaking of the historical past without any reference to the future would be an idle academic exercise, whereas it is imperative upon us, for the sake of helping human communities and improving the state of the world, to find out how the relations of Asian countries, and especially those of the Muslim countries, with Europe stand today. Why? Because Muslims and Europeans are next-door neighbours, and nations, unlike individuals, cannot choose their neighbours. Therefore, apart from moral, cultural and humanitarian reasons, Islam and Europe must, by force of historic and geographical circumstance, get to know one another better, and then move on to improve their political, economic and cultural relations. Our futures are inseparable because our pasts have been inseparable. Even today, in our schools of philosophy, the views of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, and those of Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein from among the modernists are taught alongside the views of al-Kindi, Farabi, Ibn Sina (*Avicenna*), Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. If the great civilizations of Asia view themselves today in a Western mirror and get to know one another through the West, it was Islam that served in the not-too-distant past as a mirror to the West; it was a mirror in which the West could see its own past and its own philosophical and cultural heritage. If dialogue is not a simple choice but a necessity for our two cultures, then this dialogue should be conducted with the true representatives of Islamic culture and thought. Otherwise, what good will it do for the West to talk with a few 'Westoxicated' types who are themselves no more than inferior and deformed images of the West? This would not be a dialogue; it would not even amount to a monologue. A profound, thoughtful and precise dialogue with Islamic civilization would be helpful in finding fair and practical solutions to some of the grave problems that beset the world today. The crisis of the family, the crisis in the relationship of man and nature, the ethical crisis that has developed in scientific research, and many more problems of this nature should be among the items on the agenda of an Islamic-European dialogue.

Dialogue is such a desirable thing, because it is based on freedom and free will. In a dialogue, no idea can be imposed on the other side. In a dialogue, one should respect the independent identity of the other side and his or her independent ideological and cultural integrity. Only in such a case can dialogue be a preliminary step leading to peace, security and justice.

In the meanwhile, conducting a dialogue with Iran has its own advantages. Iran is a door-to-door neighbour with Europe on one side, and with Asia on the other. Thus Iran is the meeting point of Eastern and Western cultures, just as man is the meeting point of the soul's East and the reason's West. The Persian heart and the Persian mind are brimful with a sense of balance, affection and tolerance, and for this reason, Iranians are the advocates of dialogue and adherents to justice and peace.

## SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR 1933–

Educated in Iran and the United States, Nasr graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. Nasr taught at Teheran University until 1979 and founded the Iranian Academy of Philosophy. He is University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. A prolific author, he has made major contributions to the field of Islamic and Iranian studies and been a leader in a school of thought known as the perennial philosophy. Among his many publications are *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization*, *Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, and *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*.

## Reflections on Islam and the West: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

... We wish to reflect and meditate on the question of the relation between Islam and the West in the future on the basis of the past. In discussing this most important and timely issue, and in light of what has already been paid, we must pause and ask again what we mean by the two terms Islam and the West. Which Islam and which West are we considering? Is it traditional Islam as practiced by the majority of Muslims, the Islam of pious men and women who seek to live in the light of God's teachings as revealed in the Quran and in surrender to His will? Or is it modernist interpretations that seek to interpret the Islamic tradition in view of currently prevalent Western ideas and fashions of thought? Or yet, is it the extreme forms of politically active Islam that, in exasperation, before dominance by non-Islamic forces both outside and inside the borders of most Islamic countries, takes recourse to ideas and methods of certain strands of recent Western political history, including, in some cases, terrorism, which is against Islamic law and which was not invented by them?

Nor is the reality of the West in any way homogeneous. In fact, practically the only political unity observed in the West these days appears in the hatred of Islam, as shown in the case of Bosnia and Chechnya, where

From Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 267–84.

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