ENCOUNTERS

JOURNAL OF INTER-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Encounters is a journal that seeks to promote a spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding between people of different religions and persuasions. It is no longer possible today to ignore the 'other' and live in isolation. The growing encounters of Muslims with Christians in the East and the West, the changes in the geo-political map of the world, the extreme radicalization of religion, as well as the challenges posed by modernity to traditional values, and of revival of religions and moral values to modernity, have wider repercussions and need urgent attention. *Encounters* aims to provide a forum for meticulous analysis and discussion of these questions and other wider issues incorporating those of inter-religious dialogue, Islam and the West and Islamic resurgence.

Cover calligraphy courtesy of Mohamed Abu Mustafa (Islamic Art & Design)
(Meaning: Victorious only is Allah)

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Man and the Future of Civilization: An Islamic Perspective

Khurshid Ahmad

Man has conquered the seas and the skies; man has harnessed the forces of nature to his service; man has created vast and complex institutions and organizations to administer his affairs; man seems to have reached the pinnacle of material progress!

Man also claims to have reflected deeply upon his position in the universe. He has begun to interpret reality with the sole use of his reason and the knowledge yielded by his senses and experiences. With a new-found confidence in his own reasoning power and the powers of science and technology, he has jettisoned his link with tradition, with revealed truth, with the transcendent dimension, indeed with every form of guidance from beyond himself.

From this elevated position he seeks to mould the world according to his ideas, whims and fancies. But the 'brave new world' he has created drives more and more men and women into profound disillusionment. In spite of unprecedented technological advancement and overall material development, the condition of man remains highly unsettled. He sees the powerful subjugating the weak, the rich dominating the poor, the 'have-nots' arrayed against the 'haves'; he sees injustice and exploitation at national and international levels; he sees disintegration of the family, alienation of individuals from society and its institutions, even from himself; and he sees the abuse of trust and authority in all spheres of human life and activity. Although he has shown his ability to fly in the air like the birds, and to swim in the oceans like the fish, he has failed to show his ability to live on the earth as a good human being. His failure here brings into doubt his capability to conduct his affairs in society without clear-cut guidelines for human action.

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Man finds himself in a dilemma. He believes that he has reached the apex of civilization. However, on reaching the apex he faces a new and greater void. He finds himself and the civilization he has built threatened by forces of his own creation. He searches frantically for remedies to rid his life of those portents of destruction which threaten to deprive him of his cherished dream of ultimate bliss. He finds that his world-view lacks definitive criteria to help him judge between right and wrong; he finds that his learning and expertise fail to give him universal criteria to distinguish between good and bad; he finds that change and the pace of change have swept him off his feet and thrown him into a morass of relativism — nothing tangible and lasting remains as the basis of morality, individual and social. Increasingly man becomes dubious about the direction in which he is heading. His inability to conceive a way out of this dilemma plunges him into despair and gloom. Man becomes increasingly selfish and unmindful of other human beings, of his own kith and kin as much as of humanity's collective needs. Man becomes aware of a choice: either he relinquishes all pretence to be anything other than an animal and sadly pronounces himself as the 'naked ape' or he strives further to regain and retain his sanity and search for a new paradigm for man and society.

The Crisis of Civilization

This is the predicament of man in the last decade of the twentieth century. All major philosophers of history of the present century from Oswald Spengler (*The Decline of the West*)[1] to Arnold Toynbee (*A Study of History*)[2] and Pitirim Sorokin (*Social and Cultural Dynamics* and *The Crisis of Our Age*)[3] are of the view that the dominant secular-humanistic civilization of the West, despite its material affluence and military prowess, is in the throes of a serious crisis. The forces that led to the rise and predominance of this civilization have lost their rallying power. The forces of disintegration and decay are now overtaking the forces of strength and consolidation. The moorings that secured the ship are collapsing: values that held people together are in disarray. The malaise is no longer confined to one or a few areas; the whole river of life has become polluted.

Joseph A. Camilleri, a perceptive analyst of contemporary history, describes this crisis of our times brilliantly:

The contemporary human crisis is so profound and pervasive that the very attempt to analyze it — let alone resolve it — seems to defy the power of human reason and imagination. The battle for survival is currently being waged by millions of men whose precarious existence is one of poverty, squalor and even hunger. Man's predicament impinges on the future of entire nations that are threatened by external attack or internal disintegration. It dominates the vast network of international relations so delicately poised on the dangerous and ultimately unstable 'balance of terror' . . .

Traditional conceptions of time, space and movement have been overthrown by the technological revolution and the shift to an exploitative, power-centered culture. The ensuing social and psychological discontinuity and moral vacuum have produced a severe crisis of conscience and a large-scale flight from reality . . .

The crisis which confronts twentieth century man is truly global, not simply by virtue of countless men and women, but in the more far-reaching sense that it permeates and vitiates the whole fabric of human relations and human institutions, and is now distorting man's entire relationship with the natural order . . . No human community, no individual, no corner of the globe, however remote or isolated, however powerful or well endowed, can now escape from the disorder which affects the entire planet . . . Perhaps we can best describe the global crisis in terms of a fundamental disequilibrium which severely limits and may ultimately destroy man's capacity for biological and cultural adaptation to his environment.

Among the most common forms of pathological behaviour in modern industrial society, one would include the preoccupation with having and acquiring, rather than with being or becoming; the obsession with the power to dominate rather than liberate; the profound sense of alienation from rather than participation in the wider social reality; the attitude towards work and leisure as means of killing time rather than creatively living in time; the predisposition to an in-group rather than an out-group psychology which discriminates on the basis of sex, race, creed or nationality; the tendency to resolve conflicts through the use or threat of force . . . What distinguishes the super-industrial system — and the global spread of its empire — is the high degree with which social pathology has been institutionalized through the pyramidal stratification of wealth, power and knowledge, but above all through the growing monopoly of industrial production over the satisfaction of human wants . . . the institutional integration of pathological behaviour has now reached such proportions that it is not merely the quality but the very survival of human life which is at risk . . . If this is an accurate diagnosis of the serious and deteriorating condition of our civilization,

then no piece-meal, provisional, or parochial remedy is likely to prove efficacious. It would appear that in order to sustain the organic evolution of the human species it will be necessary to develop perspectives and responses that are both radical and global in inspiration.[4]

The latest Report by the Council of the Club of Rome, *The First Global Revolution* (1991), which has appeared as a follow-up to the earlier report published in 1972, *The Limits to Growth*, is not only the most recent index of this crisis; it is also an eloquent plea to search for a way out of the crisis by going back to the basic essentials. The report starts with the succinct observation:

> Human kind seems to be gripped by a *fin de siècle* attitude of uncertainty at the threshold of the new century, but the end of a millennium brings a still deeper mystique with its sense of widespread rapid change and the uncertainty accompanying it.[5]

The report acknowledges that despite unprecedented economic development about 1.3 billion people, more than 20 per cent of the world's population are seriously sick or malnourished. It records as 'an indisputable fact', 'the world economic discrepancies, the flagrant inequalities, the vast and extreme poverty facing an excess of wealth', 'all sorts of tensions and conflicts which are showing up here and there in the most diverse geographic zones'. The report focuses on 'the contemporary situation' as 'an increasing awareness that the human race, in pursuit of material gain by exploitation of nature is racing towards destruction of the planet itself'. Focusing on 'the human malaise' the report observes:

> The shock waves produced by the drastic changes of the first global revolution are sparing no region and no society. The upheaval has broken up relationships and belief systems inherited from the past without giving guidelines for the future. There are so many reasons for doubts and despairs: the disappearance of values and references; the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the world and the difficulty of understanding the new global society; unsolved problems such as continuing environmental deterioration and extreme poverty and underdevelopment in the Southern countries; the impact of mass media, often operating as a magnifying glass for a crushing reality and a throbbing song of calamity.[6]

Delineating the nature and extent of the challenge, the report says:

> Never in the course of history has mankind been faced with so many threats and dangers: catapulted unprepared into a world where time and distance have been abolished, man is sucked into a planetary cyclone swirling with seemingly unrelated factors, the causes and consequences of which form an inextricable maze . . . at this coming turn of the century, mankind is overwhelmed by the scope of the phenomenon coming at it from all sides, overwhelmed – and the word is not too strong – because traditional structures and institutions can no longer manage the problems in their present dimension. To make things worse, the archaic and unsuitable structures are set in a true moral crisis. The disappearance of value systems, the questioning of traditions, the collapse of ideologies, the absence of a global vision, the limits of the current practices of democracy confirm the void confronting societies. Individuals feel helpless, caught, as it were, between the rise of previously unknown perils on the one hand, and, on the other, an incapacity to answer the complex problems in time and to attack the roots of evil, not just its consequences.[7]

It is interesting and instructive to note that the report, while assessing this *problematique,* invites humankind to reflect upon *Sūrah* 103: 2–3 of the Qur'ān:

> Indeed, man is in distress! Except for those who believe and do good deeds, and command love among themselves, and command patient endeavour among themselves.[8]

The Islamic Alternative

Any objective analysis of the contemporary crisis of civilization is bound to suggest that mankind stands at a critical juncture. More of the same is a recipe for disaster. Survival depends on a fresh start – on a rediscovery of the moral moorings of humankind and the affirmation of a vision of humans and society based on a moral understanding of the world, humankind and its destiny.

At this stage, humans need to discover the Word of God. It informs them of their Creator, informs them of the purpose of their creation, informs them of their place as the 'best of creation', provides them with guidance to lead a fulfilling and rewarding life, tells them of the Hereafter, teaches them the value of their fellow beings, makes everything else subservient to the criterion of truth and justice – in

short, it enables them to be at peace with themselves, the whole of creation and the Creator.[9]

In the face of this real challenge to humankind today, all men and women of faith must state with all the force at their command that the real issue is not simply one of a new economic order or a new political arrangement, but of a new world order, based on a new concept of the human person and a different vision of society and the destiny of the human community. Any effort at reform under the inspiration of the world faiths in general and Islam in particular must start by correcting this perspective for understanding the human predicament and the way out.

The real need is not to seek concessions here and there to bring about some changes in the superstructures. It is rather to re-examine the foundations on which the entire structure of society and the economy is built and the ideals which the culture aspires to achieve. The crisis in economic, political and social relations is the natural outcome of those ideals and the structures which have been built to realize them. Islam, therefore, suggests that it is only through inviting humankind to have a new vision of humans and society that its house can be set in order. This calls for a basic change in our approach.

The methodology and strategy of change, as developed and practised in the contemporary West, has assumed that a radical transformation of humans can be brought about only by changing the environment and institutions. That is why emphasis has always been placed on external restructuring. The failure of this method lies in ignoring people as its real focus – their beliefs, motives, values and commitments. It has ignored the need to bring about change within men and women themselves and has concentrated more on change in the outside world. What is needed, however, is a total change – *within* people themselves *as well as in their socio-economic environment*. The problem is not merely structural, although structural arrangements would also have to be remodelled. The starting point must be the hearts and souls of men and women, their perception of reality, and their own place and mission in life.

The Islamic approach to social change takes cognizance of all these elements:

1.   Social change is not a result of totally predetermined historical forces. Although the existence of a number of obstacles and constraints is a fact of life and history, there is no historical determinism. Change has to be planned and

engineered. And this change should be purposeful, that is, a movement towards the ideal.

2.   People are the active agent of change. All other forces have been subordinated to them in their capacity as God's vicegerent and deputy (*khalīfa*) on the earth. Within the framework of the divine arrangement of this universe and its laws, it is the humans themselves who are responsible for making or marring their destiny.

3.   There needs to be change not only in the environment but also within the hearts and souls of men and women – their attitudes, motivation, commitment, and their resolve to mobilize all that is within them and around them for the fulfilment of their objectives.

4.   Life is a network of interrelationships. Change means some disruption in some relationships somewhere. So there is a danger of change becoming an instrument of disequilibrium within men and women and in society. Islamically-oriented social change would cause the least friction and disequilibria, with planned and co-ordinated movement from one state of equilibrium to a higher one, or from a state of disequilibrium towards equilibrium. Hence, change has to be balanced, gradual and evolutionary. Innovation is to be coupled with integration. It is this unique Islamic approach which leads to revolutionary changes along an evolutionary trajectory.

These basic changes, if implemented, will transform our methods of dealing with the problems of a new world order.

The religion of Islam embodies the final and most complete Word of God. It is the embodiment of the code of life which God, the Creator and the Lord of the Universe, has revealed for the guidance of the human race. Islam integrates humans with God and His Creation in such a way that the humans move in co-operation with all that exists. Neglect of this dimension has impoverished human life and has made most of humankind's material conquests meaningless. Over-secularization has deprived human life of its spiritual significance. However, spiritual greatness cannot be achieved by a simple swing of the pendulum to the other extreme. Harmony and equilibrium can be attained only by the integration of the material with the spiritual. This is the way advocated by Islam. It makes the whole of the domain of existence spiritual and religious. It stands for the harmonization of the human will with the Divine Will: this is how peace is

achieved in human life. It is through peace with God that people attain peace and human order, and also peace with nature, outside as well as within them.

Humans and nature are not at war with each other; they are partners engaged in a common effort to achieve the divine mission. There is no place for neglect of the ecological dimension in this integrated approach. In our search for a new world order today, Islam emphasizes that we must aspire to a new paradigm for life, which could tackle human problems differently, not merely from the perspective of limited national or regional interest, but also from the perspective of what is right and wrong, and how best we can strive to evolve a just and humane world order at different levels of our existence, individual, national and international.

That the present order is characterized by injustice and exploitation has been proved beyond any shadow of a doubt. Islam suggests that the present order fails because it is based upon a wrong concept of human beings and their relationship with other humans, society, nature and the world. The search for a new order brings us to the need for a new concept of human beings and their role. From the viewpoint of world religions in general, and Islam in particular, the focus of the discussion must be shifted to a new vision of the person and society, to an effort to bring about change at the level of human consciousness and values, leading to a new cultural transformation.

Islam is a movement for social change. It gives not only a clear concept of society and the *modus vivendi* of bringing about the coveted change in history, but also clear guidelines for socio-economic policy, for some of the key institutions that guarantee the implementation of that policy, and an organized social effort under disciplined leadership to see that these objectives are achieved in space and time.

Muslims have this movement-oriented approach to religion. This model operates at three levels: that of the individual, society and the world. First, unless individuals have a new faith, a new consciousness and a new perception of their own role, the required changes cannot be brought about. Second is the level of society. Initially it may be at the national level, though later the whole world may be included. The Islamic strategy is that it starts with creating a new consciousness in the individual, who imbibes its values and strives for the establishment of a just life, not on the basis of expediency or primarily to seek personal or group interests, but to do what is right and just. The Qur'ān shows us how an individual problem

has to be dealt with at the universal level when it says that if one person is unjustly killed, this is tantamount to killing the entire human race, and that whoever saves one single life saves the whole race.[10] This is how an individual incident is transformed into a world problem, how an event opens up the realm of values.

Islam is not a defence of the status quo. Instead, it is a critique of human life, including the lives of Muslims and the organization of Muslim society. Present-day Muslim society falls far short of Islamic standards. Thus we believe that Muslim society has to be reformed and restructured in order to establish those social, economic and political norms and institutions which would establish justice in human relations. Islam wants to bring political power under the control of its moral ideals. Such a society and state would be established as a result of a social movement directed towards Islamic revival. Thus Muslims would be in a position to play their ideological role in the world, by first setting their own house in order, making their own resources available to build a model society where they have political power, and then by sharing it with others in the interests of justice, acting on the same principle followed by the Prophet when he helped the famine-stricken people of Makka although they were politically at war with him.

The Islamic State has never been at war with human beings as such; its confrontation is with the institutions which represent belligerent political power. This may help lead humankind towards the model of a new world order where justice will be done to all, friend and foe alike, and where wealth will be shared with the needy not because it is expedient but because this is just.

The basic values on which this world order is established are as follows:

1.   *Tawḥīd (God's Unity and Sovereignty)*

This is the foundation on which Islam's world-view and its scheme of life is based. It lays down the rules of the God-human and human-human relationships. *Tawḥīd* is not merely a metaphysical doctrine. The human approach to social reality is an inextricable part of this belief. The establishment of justice in human relations is a demand of this faith. Belief in God's Unity and His Sovereignty means that all human beings are equal, and that their rights (*Ḥuqūq al-'ibād*) are a natural extension of God's rights (*Ḥuqūq Allah*). The Qur'ān says:

Have you observed him who denies the *dīn*? [the faith and religion, the
divine law; the principle of accountability; the Day of Judgement]
He is the one who spurns the orphan,
Does not urge the feeding of the needy,
Bitter grief to worshippers
Who are neglectful of their prayers;
Who would be seen in prostration
Yet refuse kindnesses and charity.[11]

2.   Khilāfa (Vicegerency)

Islam defines human beings' status in the world as that of God's vicegerents –
His deputies and representatives. Everything that exists is at the disposal of humans
for the fulfilment of this roll. All resources, physical and otherwise, are in the
nature of a trust in our hands. This means that we are not the masters, we are God's
agents and our primary concern should be the fulfilment of the Will of the Lord.
We are in the position of trustees in respect of everything in the universe, our
personal faculties and all our possessions and belongings. All authority is to be
exercised within the framework of this trust and we are accountable for what we
do. This principle stipulates our active participation in the affairs of the world, to
seek life-fulfilment. This invites us to treat the whole of creation not as foe, but as
partner and friend, made to fulfil the same objectives. The Islamic concept of the
equality and brotherhood of human beings and the creation of the ideological
kinship of the *umma* (the community of faith) are essential elements of this
principle of *khilāfa*, human trusteeship and stewardship.

3.   Establishment of Justice Among Human Beings

The establishment of justice among human beings is one of the basic
objectives for which God raised His Prophets and sent down His guidance.[12] All
human beings have rights to all that God has provided and thus God's bounties are
to be shared equitably.[13] The poor and the needy have a right to the wealth of the
rich and society.[14] They must be helped and enabled to acquire skills so as to earn
their livings with dignity.

4.   Political and Economic Power are not Evil

It is a part of our religious mission to harness political and economic power
for the fulfilment of moral objectives. Instead of remaining instruments of
oppression and exploitation, they must be made to serve the ends of justice, to
promote good and virtue and to forbid evil and vice.[15]

5.   There are no Intermediaries Between God and Humans

God's guidance is available in the form of His Book, the Qur'ān and the
life-example of His Prophet, the *Sunna*. They clearly state the ideals, values and
principles that we need to build our individual and collective lives on truth and
justice and there exists in this guidance a built-in mechanism to meet the demands
of changing times. Evolution and growth take place within this framework. Only
the divine law is eternal, all human expedients are temporary and time-bound.
Adherence to the divine law is the greatest guarantee against human arbitrariness
and relapse into injustice.

These are the basic principles on which Islam wants to rebuild the world
order. The first contribution that Islam wants to make is to the way in which this
problem is viewed. Islam adopts an all-embracing approach based on a spiritual
appreciation of reality. It regards men and women from the aspect of their total
existence in relation to their Creator and His entire creation. It admits of no
dichotomy either between matter and spirit, or between the physical and the
moral. It welds the religious with the secular and treats life as one integrated and
harmonious whole. It is also free from any gender complex. It treats men and
women equally as God's vicegerents and subject to the same criterion for success,
here and in the Hereafter.[16]

Islam stands for total change, as against all contemporary ideologies and some
religious systems which are content with partial change. It purifies the individual
and reconstructs society, making both the individual and society achieve a still
higher ideal: fulfilment of the Divine Will, through the establishment of justice
among humans.

The Islamic way is based on values and not on the demands of expediency,
personal or national. Its outlook is positive and constructive and not just negative
or destructive. It seeks the person's total welfare – moral, social and economic. It
stands for the realization of justice in all aspects of human living. It upholds the

principle of universal good and justice and invites the entire human community to work for its establishment. It affirms the integrity of individuals and the sanctity of their human rights as rights guaranteed by the Creator, and tries to establish a social order wherein peace, dignity and justice prevail.

Islam's strategy for the establishment of such a world order consists in inviting all human beings to take this path, irrespective of their colour, race, language, nationality, ethnic or historical origin. It does not speak the language of the interests of the east or the west, of the north or the south, of the developed or the underdeveloped. It wants the new order to be established for all human beings in all parts of the world. Through this universal approach Islam wants to bring about a new consciousness of the ideals and principles on which the house of humanity should be rebuilt, and invites humankind to spell out its implications for the reconstruction of human thought and policy.

Islam also launches a social movement, an international movement requiring all those who accept these ideals and values to establish the new order. Islam is eager to establish the new model in any part of the world. If it reconstructs its social order on these principles, the Muslim world could be the living example of it. However, the present reality of the Muslims is far removed from the ideal. Once this model is established somewhere in the world, the experiment can be shared with everyone else, just as sunshine is shared by all. Its prospects depend very much upon the Islamic movement that is trying to spearhead this social effort for the establishment of a new world order.

The Islamic Resurgence and the New World Order

Contemporary Islamic resurgence is unique in the universality of its character and the richness of its depth. Political ideologies have struggled to achieve similar unity, yet all have failed after brief, cosmetic success. Jamal Abdel Nasser's Arab Nationalism, after deluding the Arab world, proved to be a failure. The Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athī regimes are operative owing only to the extremely repressive measures they impose. Communism's farce has been discredited in all parts of the world – Russia, Eastern Europe, Latin and Central America, and Africa. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of Soviet Russia are an epitaph to Socialism which is fading into the background of history. Yet Islam has unified ethnic and culturally diverse peoples across continents. It leaves no room for 'Arab Islam',

'Pakistani Islam', 'Iranian Islam' or 'Turkish Islam': there is only Islam. Thus, within Islamic universalism there is unity but no uniformity.

Muslims in general, and particularly many leaders of the current resurgence, are as self-critical as they are ethnically diverse. This willingness to re-examine symbols that have been embodied in religious tradition aims to reconstruct certain conceptions of Islam: the spiritual, social, political and economic. Thus the spirit of the Islamic resurgence can conceivably be defined as a return to the roots of Islamic idiom.

This return to the 'sources' is seen by Muslims as a liberating force, yet it is labelled by secular elites and the West as 'fundamentalism'. Reviving the faith and establishment of a *dīn*, the essential premise upon which Islamic life is based, is not akin to a 'fundamentalism' that has become bogged down in retrogressive, violent, historical wishful thinking. Rather, it brings a freshness of approach, a new commitment, dynamism, flexibility and an ability to face current challenges. Many people are rediscovering Islam as a source of civilization and culture, and a necessary factor in shaping society.

The current phase of Islamic resurgence entails moving away from a slavish imitation of Western models, and adopting a selective outlook on what should and should not be adopted from external civilization. Although Islamic society can benefit from the Western experience in a number of ways, it has no intention of perpetuating the imposition of alien cultures at the expense of its own.

Observers often pose the question: Can Muslim countries afford to reject certain choices *vis-à-vis* development, technology and so on? Simply put, they do not aim at rejection. The real question is: What type of development is on offer and what are its objectives? Muslims fear that what is being offered to their nations are modern interpretations of Europe's white man's burden – a 'civilizing' force that will not promote but actually infringe upon economic, social, moral and ideological development. Furthermore, Muslims are deeply concerned about the future of ties between Islamic states, the prospects of greater economic and political cooperation and integration. Will Islamic countries, geographically defined by colonialism, be deconstructed and redrawn or will they continue as nation-states?

Realistically, one cannot put history into reverse gear. Muslims must progress more creatively than their predecessors. The nation-state is acceptable as a starting point, although it is not an Islamic ideal. It is a geo-political reality which,

if arbitrarily dismantled, will create a political vacuum, inevitably to be filled with chaos. Therefore, a sense of unity must be fostered within the *umma* or Muslim community, and greater co-operation and integration between Islamic states must be encouraged. Islamic idealism dictates that each nation-state will eventually evolve into an ideological state, thus creating the framework of a commonwealth of Islamic regions. Either this concept is sensed by the West and therefore, mistakenly, feared, or, more short-sightedly, the West deems the current phase in the Islamization of Muslim states as a dangerous prelude to a chaos which must be stopped.

The West, in general, has failed to recognize the strength and potential of the Islamic resurgence. It has labelled members of Islamic movements fundamentalist, radical, extremist, fanatic, terrorist, anti-Western, anachronistic and so on. Obviously, such limited, disparaging definitions will not promote mutual understanding. The West is committing mistakes similar to those of its colonial predecessors, i.e., it is defining a political spectrum according to its own terms of reference, disregarding the socio-political diversity of other civilizations.

This selective viewpoint does great injustice not only to Muslims, but also to humanity in general. It promotes misconceptions among Western scholars, policy-makers and civilians alike. The Islamic resurgence is going through a period in its history which its proponents recognize as tumultuous, yet these discrepancies do not define the Islamic revival or the phoenix that will arise out of the current flames of corruption and debauchery in much of the Islamic world.

Muslims understand their current predicament to consist of more than their socio-political and economic ills. Their perception goes deeper than material deficiencies in their lives and tackles the underlying problems they face: moral decay and warped values. Some express this cognizance profoundly, others in less palpable ways. Nevertheless, these elements are sadly deficient from Western analyses of the Islamic revival. The spiritual dimension is often excluded, when in fact it is the core, as far as Muslims are concerned, of the problem. Instead, the Islamic resurgence is simplistically attributed completely to the people's frustration with the lack of progress, and their hope for economic and technological development in the guise of Islam. Such one-dimensional analyses show an ignorance of Muslim society's ethos.

Similarly erroneous is the reduction of the Islamic resurgence to merely the angry reaction of under-privileged Muslims against Western affluence. While

reaction to the legacy of imperialism certainly plays a part, more than political fury is being expressed. A far more prominent cause of turmoil is the dissatisfaction with Western ideals and values imported by elite cliques and imposed on the masses. The elites that run the institutions and systems of government force alien laws and regulations upon the people. Furthermore, Muslims are by and large disaffected with most of their governments, which they see as promoting Western interests (by imposing Western secular values and models of development) and ignoring their own.

The Islamic resurgence, therefore, is a critique of both the status quo in Muslim societies and the secular Westernization of these communities. This critical analysis stems from a point of reference not seen in contemporary history. While many Muslim governments have invoked Islamic symbols for legitimacy, few have sought wholehearted implementation of Islamic policy. The Islamic movements of today express a depth of sincerity and conviction in the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad's *Sunna* or teachings, not previously evinced by most political establishments in the region. What some observers have tried to disparage as the 'awakening Islamic monster', is in fact the reawakening of the Islamic faith and destiny. Muslim spirituality and idealism have generated in Muslims a new sense of direction and an unwavering commitment to reconstruct their world, regardless of personal sacrifice.

The colonial paradigm of leadership was one constructed strictly on self-interest. This legacy infected the Muslim world, making society virtually devoid of moral values and rife with corruption. Exploitation has become the norm in this region. Muslims have their own weaknesses which caused the decline of their civilization. Yet the degree of corruption rampant in their midst today is a new phenomenon. Muslims associate this degradation with the impact of secular Westernization.

Some Muslim interpretations of modernism spearheaded the drive to secularize Muslim society, attempting to superimpose Western liberalism on Islamic sensibilities – an explosive combination! Thus, morality was compromised and subverted, leaving a vacuum. Personal aggrandizement and socio-economic exploitation have taken advantage of this vacuity in the name of economic development and material progress.

The Islamic resurgence is a rebellion against such destructive trends. Ideally, it seeks reaffirmation of Islamic morality and a redirection of the *umma*'s resources – material and human – towards social justice and self-reliance.

The Islamic resurgence is a positive, ideological movement by Muslims which is concerned with the reconstruction of the Muslim world's socio-economic order based on the values of Islam. It has no expansionist tendencies. It is bound to cross paths with members of the international community, and have disagreements with some of them. While the colonial legacy is relevant to popular unrest in the region, it is not going to remain the most decisive factor in provoking Islamic reaction.

However, Muslim criticism of Western civilization is not an exercise in political confrontation and should not be defined as such. The relationship is one of competitiveness between two civilizations: one based on Islamic values, the other founded on materialism, nationalism and liberalism. It creates a choice between the Divine Principle and the Secular Materialist Culture. The emphasis here is on choice. Secularism, whether it is capitalist or socialist, does not possess a monopoly over appropriate ideology. The presence of the Islamic resurgence gives many an avenue of escape from the worldly shackles of materialism. It widens humanity's choice. This should be looked upon as a blessing and an opportunity, not a threat.

Notes

1   Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*. Authorized translation with notes by Charles Atkinson (London: G. Allen, 1922) in two volumes.

2   Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, published under the auspices of Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1934).

3   Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York: American Book Company, 1937); *The Crisis of Our Age: Its Social and Cultural Outlook* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946).

4   Joseph A. Camilleri, *Civilization in Crisis: Human Prospects in a Changing World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 1–2, 5, 9, 11, 179–80.

5   Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider, *The First Global Revolution*, a report of the Council of the Club of Rome (London: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. xv.

6   Ibid., p. 87.

7   Ibid., pp. 95–6.

8   Ibid., p. 89.

9   *Islam*, literally the way of submission and peace, is derived from the root *SLM* which stands for (a) submission, i.e. submission to God, the Creator, and (b) peace, i.e. it is by submission to the Will of God that peace within and peace without can be attained.

10 Qur'ān, 5: 32.

11 Qur'ān, 107: 1–7.

12 Qur'ān, 57: 25.

13 Qur'ān, 14: 33–4.

14 Qur'ān, 51: 19.

15 Qur'ān, 2: 143; 3: 110; 17: 80–1. See also, Khurshid Ahmad, *Islamic Approach to Development* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1994).

16 Ibid. See also, Khurshid Ahmad, *Family Life in Islam* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1981).